

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5830

As of February 21, 2019

Title: An act relating to vehicle combinations that may be operated on public highways.

Brief Description: Concerning vehicle combinations that may be operated on public highways.

Sponsors: Senators King, Hobbs, Warnick, Nguyen and Fortunato.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Transportation: 2/20/19.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Requires the Washington State Department of Transportation to implement a pilot project allowing three-vehicle combinations—triple trailers—to operate on designated highways.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION

Staff: Kelly Simpson (786-7403)

Background: Under current law, it is generally unlawful to operate on public highways any combination of vehicles consisting of more than two vehicles. However, the addition of another axle to the tractor of a truck tractor-semitrailer or pole trailer combination that supports a proportional share of the load of the semitrailer or pole trailer is not deemed a separate vehicle and is part of the truck tractor. The maximum combined length allowed for a combination consisting of a tractor and two trailers is 61 feet.

Summary of Bill: The Washington State Department of Transportation (DOT) must implement a pilot project to allow combinations of vehicles consisting of no more than three vehicles to operate on designated public highways. DOT may specify operating conditions to ensure a safe and efficient highway system. DOT must collect data to describe the volumes of three vehicle combinations and the impacts on highway safety, traffic movement, and the environment. The total combination of vehicles under the pilot project may not exceed 105 feet of overall length.

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

The pilot project ends June 30, 2024. By January 1st of each year through 2024, DOT must submit a status and performance report on the implementation of the pilot project.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on February 14, 2019.

Creates Committee/Commission/Task Force that includes Legislative members: No.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: This bill merely provides a limited pilot project. It would significantly reduce congestion and carbon emissions by reducing the number of trucks on our highways. Allowing triple-trailers would be good for business and helps to keep up with our growing economy. The pilot would not jeopardize federal funding. A 2004 federal study showed no additional damage to the highway infrastructure from triple-trailers. Triple-trailers have a safe record and accounted for only around 1 percent of collisions. It is time for the state to conduct a pilot. The bill should be amended to make the pilot contingent on federal approval.

CON: Triple-trailers do not belong on highways. They pose a very serious safety hazard. They lead to driver fatigue, especially in bad weather, they ruin highway infrastructure, and frustrate other drivers. Congress has banned triple-trailers from the national network, except for the few grandfathered states. The bill jeopardizes federal highway funding to Washington State. Our state does not have the weigh station capacity to accommodate triple-trailers. The bill would put the Washington State Patrol even further behind its goal of meeting 115 vehicle inspections per year.

OTHER: Triple-trailers improve freight efficiency, congestion, and commercial motor vehicle driver shortages. But it would shift freight from some railroads that are operating efficiently. Triple-trailers place wear and tear on highways, and jeopardizes federal funding. Triple-trailers should not be operating on county roads.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator Curtis King, Prime Sponsor; Mark Johnson, Washington Retail; Sheri Call, Washington Trucking Associations; Bill Gehlson, Old Dominion Freight Lines; Todd Boldin, Reddaway Trucking; Ron Kieswether, Peninsula Truck Lines Inc.; Jeff DeVere, Washington Trucking Associations; Troy Emerson, United Parcel Service; Tom Mueller, Oak Harbor Freight Lines.

CON: Timothy McCarthy, Teamsters Local 174; Carl Gasca, Teamsters; John Nisbet, Washington State Department of Transportation; Monica Alexander, Washington State Patrol.

OTHER: Jane Wall, Washington State Association of Counties; Mike Ennis, Association of Washington Business.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: No one.