SENATE BILL REPORT
SB 6597

As of January 29, 2020

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 Sheldon and O'Ban.

Brief History:
  Committee Activity: Transportation: 1/28/20.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Requires the Washington State Department of Transportation to allow combinations of vehicles consisting of a truck tractor and three trailing units to operate on designated highways, but only if the federal government first approves the action.

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. Generally, 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 (WSDOT) must allow combinations of vehicles consisting of a truck tractor and three trailing units to operate on designated highways, but only if the federal government approves a variance to the existing freeze of state law imposed by the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991.

WSDOT may also specify by rule other operating conditions to ensure a safe and efficient highway system.

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.

WSDOT must collect certain data regarding the allowance of such vehicle combinations on public highways, and submit an annual status and performance report on the implementation of the variance.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on January 25, 2020.

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 has been around for a few years. The safety record of triple-trailers is a good one in the 17 states that allow them. This bill would result in a significant reduction in truck trips and emissions. The bill would not allow an immediate allowance of triple-trailers in Washington, it would not result in a loss of federal funds, and it does not adjust the current weight requirements. The bill would set up a process at WSDOT similar to the issuance of overweight permits, and is a reasonable approach. The regulations would be strict, resulting in safe and efficient operation of triple-trailers. The bill would result in reductions in fuel needed to transport retail goods, the cost of retail goods, and emissions of trucks transporting retail goods. The bill would help drivers coming from Idaho and Oregon who currently have to stop at the Washington border and drop one of their trailers.

CON: This bill makes Washington's highways even more dangerous than they currently are. More trailers means more sway and instability. Washington weather and terrain makes this bill unsafe. The bill's efficiencies and environmental benefits are overstated.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator Tim Sheldon, Prime Sponsor; Mark Johnson, Washington Retail Association; Russ Goff, United Parcel Service—Oregon; Jeff DeVere, on behalf of Washington Trucking Associations; Sheri Call, Washington Trucking Associations; Mike Ennis, Association of Washington Business.

CON: Vlad Gutman-Britten, Washington State Labor Council; Kris DeBuck, Business Agent, Teamsters Local Union 174.

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