



Senate Fiscal Agency
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BILL ANALYSIS



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Senate Bill 274 (as reported without amendment)
Sponsor: Senator Rick Jones
Committee: Transportation

Date Completed: 6-24-15

RATIONALE

In the trucking industry, a tow bar or up to three saddle mounts can be used to connect several truck tractors piggyback style, enabling all of the vehicles to be transported using the motive power of the front tractor.¹ As a rule, the maximum length of such a vehicle combination allowed on a Michigan highway is 55 feet, although the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) or a local authority may designate a highway on which the maximum length is 75 feet. Since 2005, however, Federal regulations have authorized such vehicle combinations of up to 97 feet, and the Michigan Department of State Police (MSP) evidently has adopted an internal policy consistent with those regulations for enforcement purposes. Thus, it has been suggested that Michigan's statutory language be revised to conform to the Federal regulations and MSP policy.

CONTENT

The bill would amend the Michigan Vehicle Code to increase the maximum allowable length of certain vehicle combinations using a tow bar or saddle mounts on a designated highway.

The Code prohibits operation on a Michigan highway of vehicles and vehicle combinations that exceed prescribed "normal length maximums". For more than one motor vehicle, wholly or partially assembled, in combination, using one tow bar or three saddle mounts with full mount mechanisms and using the motive power of one of the vehicles in combination, the normal length maximum is 55 feet.

The Michigan Department of Transportation or a local authority, however, may designate a highway under its jurisdiction to allow the operation of vehicles that exceed the normal maximum length prescribed in the Code. On a designated highway, the maximum allowable length of a vehicle combination described above is 75 feet. The bill would increase the maximum length to 97 feet.

The bill would take effect 90 days after it was enacted.

MCL 257.719

ARGUMENTS

(Please note: The arguments contained in this analysis originate from sources outside the Senate Fiscal Agency. The Senate Fiscal Agency neither supports nor opposes legislation.)

Supporting Argument

Although the MSP apparently has been enforcing the 97-foot maximum allowed by Federal regulations on designated highways, the shorter maximum specified in State law might cause hesitation on the part of some trucking business owners to use saddle-mount vehicle combinations

¹ In a saddle-mounted vehicle combination, only the first vehicle has both front and rear wheels on the ground. On the other trucks, only the rear wheels touch the ground, and the front wheels rest on the trucks ahead of them.

that exceed 75 feet. Reportedly, in some cases, this can limit the scale of their business operations or deter them from expanding and creating new jobs. The proposed revision to the statutory language would create consistency and make it explicit that longer saddle-mount vehicle combinations could operate without penalty on highways deemed appropriate by MDOT or a local authority--generally, interstate highways and other roads that provide reasonable access between those highways and freight terminals or facilities for food, fuel, repairs, and rest. The extra length would enable trucking companies to make fewer trips, reducing their costs, greenhouse gas emissions, and deterioration of designated highways.

Legislative Analyst: Julie Cassidy

FISCAL IMPACT

The bill could decrease civil infraction fine revenue, which is dedicated to public libraries under the Vehicle Code. To the extent that vehicles are currently fined for having a length greater than 75 feet, but not greater than 97 feet, these vehicles would no longer be subject to a civil infraction penalty.

Fiscal Analyst: John Maxwell

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This analysis was prepared by nonpartisan Senate staff for use by the Senate in its deliberations and does not constitute an official statement of legislative intent.