



**House
Legislative
Analysis
Section**

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EXPAND SCHOOL BUS USE OF STROBE LIGHTS

House Bill 5291 with committee amendment
First Analysis (5-21-90)

Sponsor: Rep. James M. Middaugh
Committee: Transportation

THE APPARENT PROBLEM:

The Vehicle Code limits the use of strobe lights (a white, intermittent flashing light) on school buses to certain situations, including inclement weather conditions, such as in fog, or in certain driving situations, such as when students are being picked up or dropped off. Some people believe this law unnecessarily restricts the use of an important safety feature which increases a bus' visibility in all sorts of conditions, any of which could be determined by a bus driver to warrant a strobe light's use. For instance, the lights can be particularly useful in rural areas where tall corn obstructs the view of nearby drivers or during hours of low light such as early morning or dusk. Apparently, some drivers have even been ticketed for using the lights at "unlawful" times. To promote safety and forestall disputes over when strobe light use is authorized, it has been suggested that strobe lights be permitted for use on school buses anytime between the hours of sunrise and sunset.

The act also specifies what types of vehicles are allowed to use amber flashing lights for safety reasons, and the list currently includes, among others, vehicles used by rural mail carriers. Some would like this authorization extended to rural deliverers of newspapers or similar publications as well.

THE CONTENT OF THE BILL:

The bill would amend the Vehicle Code to add that strobe lights could be used by a school bus driver at any time between the hours of sunset and sunrise, and that a person under contract to deliver newspapers or other publications in rural areas could use amber flashing lights on his or her vehicle.

MCL 257.698

FISCAL IMPLICATIONS:

According to the House Fiscal Agency, the bill would not affect state or local expenditures. (5-17-90)

ARGUMENTS:

For:

The white strobe lights used on school buses are effective in calling attention to these vehicles and their precious cargo, and this benefit should not be limited only to times of bad weather or the loading or unloading of pupils. The bill would extend the use of strobe lights on buses to any time between the hours of sunrise and sunset and thus would give school bus drivers more latitude in determining when the lights could help make a driving situation even safer.

Against:

Lack of consistency in school bus lighting may confuse motorists. The act currently limits the use of strobe lights to times of bad weather (as this usually means poor visibility)

or when a bus has stopped to load or unload students, and these limitations help to ensure that the lights are used when they are most needed — when the hazard to passengers is greatest. Expanding their use would only serve to reduce their warning value and encourage drivers to ignore the signal they send.

For:

Permitting amber flashers to be used on vehicles driven by rural newspaper carriers would enhance safety both for the drivers of these types of vehicles and for other nearby drivers. The act currently allows use of amber flashers by rural mail carriers and should be expanded to also allow rural deliverers of newspapers or similar publications to use them.

Response: There has yet been no demonstrated need for allowing use of amber lights by these rural carriers. Adding another group of vehicles that can use the lights would only serve to confuse the public.

POSITIONS:

The Department of State Police supports the concept of the bill. (5-18-90)

The Department of Transportation has no position on the bill. (5-18-90)

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