



Olds Plaza Building, 10th Floor  
Lansing, Michigan 48909  
Phone: 517/373-6466

## 16-FOOT-WIDE MOBILE HOMES

House Bill 4683 (Substitute H-2)  
First Analysis (6-9-93)

Sponsor: Rep. Glenn Oxender  
Committee: Transportation

### ***THE APPARENT PROBLEM:***

Michigan law has permitted since 1991 the movement of 16-foot-wide mobile homes statewide as long as permission is granted by jurisdictional authorities through which a home is to be transported and certain safety requirements are met. The movement of these wider mobile homes was first permitted in the Upper Peninsula in 1986, and, after evidence suggested they could be moved safely in the Lower Peninsula, the legislature permitted the practice under Public Act 19 of 1991, but imposed a sunset date on this authority. The sunset on this authority has been extended a number of times (originally, it was June 30, 1992, then moved to November 30 of the same year, and then extended to December 31 of this year). After two years of allowing the transport of 16-foot-wides statewide, some people now feel the sunset should be deleted altogether.

### ***THE CONTENT OF THE BILL:***

The bill would amend the vehicle code to delete the December 31, 1993, sunset that applies to the transport of 16-foot-wide mobile homes statewide and, thus, would permanently allow them to be transported anywhere in the state. The bill also would delete language requiring the Department of Transportation to contract for a study on the mobility, turning ability and transporting of mobile homes that are more than 14 and one-third feet wide plus normal appurtenances that extend no more than six inches, and coves that are not more than two feet wide. (This study was completed in the fall of 1992.)

The act currently provides guidelines for towing and moving such vehicles. Among these requirements, the act provides that a mobile home and towing vehicle which, when combined, are more than 80 feet in length or more than 12 feet wide must be equipped with certain safety items (i.e., flashing amber light on top, special signs, and the like). The bill would also impose a requirement that the mobile home be equipped with "stop lights" and

directional lights on the mobile home's rear. Also, in the case of mobile homes that were 16 feet wide, the bill would require that signs with the words "16-ft wide load" would have to be displayed on the front bumper of the towing vehicle and the back bumper of the mobile home.

MCL 257.719a and 257.719b

### ***FISCAL IMPLICATIONS:***

The Department of Transportation says the bill would not affect state or local budget expenditures. (6-7-93)

### ***ARGUMENTS:***

#### ***For:***

The bill would permanently permit 16-foot-wide mobile homes to be moved anywhere in the state by deleting the December 31, 1993, sunset from the act. This sunset has been extended twice since the authority to move 16-foot-wides statewide was first granted in 1991, but should simply be removed now. Since the wider homes were authorized to be moved in the Lower Peninsula, at least one manufacturer has moved to the state to build them and now reportedly employs hundreds of people. If at some future time public officials believe this authority should be restricted again, perhaps because one of the wider homes contributes to a serious traffic accident, the act gives the State Transportation Commission the authority to order MDOT to immediately cease issuing permits for them to be moved and to notify jurisdictional authorities of this change in policy. And even though the study done on the transport of wider mobile homes (that was finished last fall) suggests some problems that could result from transporting the wider mobile homes, a decision on whether to allow this practice ultimately should be based on actual evidence that exists of traffic mishaps involving these vehicles.

**For:**

The bill would impose additional safety precautions on transporters of wider mobile homes (those more than 12 feet in width) by requiring special "stop lights" and directional lights on the rear of such homes while they were being moved. The bill also would require transporters of 16-foot-wides to have signs on both the front and rear of the home that said, "16-ft wide load." These additional requirements would help to warn drivers who approach mobile homes in tow to do so with caution.

**Against:**

Allowing the movement of the wider homes in the Lower Peninsula presents a serious threat to other drivers. Because this type of vehicle is so big and is often moved more slowly than other traffic while in transport, a driver stuck behind one would be tempted out of impatience to pass (either on the left, or perhaps over the shoulder on the right), despite the danger this would pose for the passing driver, those towing the home, and anyone approaching from the opposite direction. In fact, according to the Department of State Police, a fatal accident occurred in late April of this year in which a person driving behind a mobile home in tow tried to pass it and hit a state trooper head-on who was approaching from the opposite direction; the driver died from internal injuries five days later. Even though the accident apparently did not involve a 16-foot-wide mobile home, it tragically illustrates the very real danger that exists when these mammoth structures are allowed to be moved over state roadways.

**Response:**

Fatal traffic accidents on state roadways occur all the time involving every type of motorized and non-motorized vehicle, but most people realize that such tragedies are simply inevitable on state roadways. Mobile homes, both the larger and smaller ones, satisfy a significant need for low-cost housing in the state, and the production of them here contributes to the state's economy and job growth. Despite this one accident, mobile homes in transport present the same degree of danger on Michigan roadways as other motor vehicles--and are perhaps even safer, considering all the safety precautions that must be taken when they're moved.

**Against:**

Pursuant to its contract with the Department of Transportation, the University of Michigan Transportation Research Institute on May 15, 1992,

issued a report on mobile homes wider than 14 feet. This report suggests that the movement of 16-foot-wide mobile homes presents a significant highway safety risk. Compared to 14-foot-wide homes, the risks involve increased encroachment by the mobile home onto adjacent passing lanes on multilane divided highways; greater use of the shoulder by oncoming drivers on two-lane undivided highways; and increased use of the shoulder by cars and trucks passing 16-foot-wide homes. The report indicates that more frequent use of the shoulder will lead to a greater number of dangerous passing situations, as drivers have less control of their vehicles on shoulder surfaces and their margin of error is reduced.

In analyzing the movement of 14-foot- and 16-foot-wide homes the study found, among other things, that:

- \* such vehicles require a much greater turning width than do many other highway vehicles, including large combinations;
- \* vehicles towing mobile homes require more than 300 feet of stopping distance when traveling at 55 miles per hour--more than double the distance required for passenger vehicles, and about one-third more than that required for heavy trucks;
- \* safety margins, despite the lack of data demonstrating a clear relationship between mobile home transport and accidents involving them, can be reduced if an accident or near-accident involving other vehicles in the vicinity of a mobile home does occur that is indirectly influenced by the home's presence (e.g., due to traffic congestion or low visibility).

The report recommends that if the movement of 16-foot-wide mobile homes is to be allowed, the following safety measures should be undertaken:

- \* Highway shoulders, especially on two-lane roads, should be upgraded;
- \* Brakes should be added to all axles on a home in transport;
- \* Vehicles towing mobile homes should be limited to 45 miles per hour on freeways and 35 miles per hour on two-lane undivided highways;
- \* Speed limits should be better enforced throughout the state;
- \* Traffic should be controlled and stopped at restricted intersections where mobile homes encroach onto oncoming traffic lanes when turning;
- \* The drivers of escorting vehicles should be required to pass special driver training courses; and

\* The driving public should be better informed about how to approach a mobile home in transport, perhaps in general driver's education programs.

***SUGGESTED AMENDMENTS:***

The Department of Transportation suggests amending the bill to include a requirement that escort drivers of wide mobile homes receive special training before being allowed to transport them, and suggests adding language to the bill that would require additional signage on escort vehicles.

***POSITIONS:***

The Department of Transportation supports the bill. (6-7-93)

The Michigan Manufactured Housing Association supports the bill. (6-7-93)

The Department of State Police historically has, for safety reasons, opposed the transport of 16-foot-wide mobile homes in the state, but has no position on the bill. (6-7-93)