



**House  
Legislative  
Analysis  
Section**

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

## 16-FOOT-WIDE MOBILE HOMES

House Bill 4683 as enrolled  
Second Analysis (2-1-94)

Sponsor: Rep. Glenn Oxender  
House Committee: Transportation  
Senate Committee: Transportation &  
Tourism

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

Since 1991, Michigan law has permitted the transport of 16-foot-wide mobile homes statewide as long as permission is granted by jurisdictional authorities through which a home is to be moved 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 legislature extended the sunset 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, 1993). After two years of allowing 16-foot-wides to be transported statewide, some people now feel the sunset should be deleted altogether and that this be accompanied by provisions requiring additional safety measures to be taken when mobile homes are moved.

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

The bill would amend the Michigan Vehicle Code to remove the expiration date on a provision allowing the movement of 16-foot wide mobile homes on roads in the Lower Peninsula. Thus, jurisdictional authorities could issue special permits to move mobile homes up to 16 feet wide, including caves, on roads statewide.

The bill also would do the following:

- \* Require a 16-foot-wide mobile home to display "16-ft wide load" signs (rather than "oversize load" signs) on both the front of the towing vehicle and the back of the home.
- \* Require a mobile home and towing vehicle which, when combined, exceed 80 feet in length or 12 feet in width to be equipped with stop lights and

directional lights on the rear of the home. (Currently, a mobile home of this size must be equipped with flashing amber lights, and both the front of the towing vehicle and the back of the home must have a sign that reads "oversize load.")

- \* Require signs and other identification for escort vehicles to conform to requirements for all escort vehicles for oversized loads.

- \* Require representatives of the mobile home manufacturing industry to develop an escort vehicle driver training program, which would have to be approved by the Truck Safety Commission by January 1, 1995.

- \* Delete a requirement that the Department of Transportation enter into a contract for a study on the mobility, turning ability, and transporting of mobile homes over 14 and one-third feet wide. (This study was completed in spring of 1992.)

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 was extended twice since the authority to move 16-foot-wides statewide was first granted in 1991, but should be removed now for a number of reasons. First, since 16-foot-wides were authorized to be moved in the Lower Peninsula, at

least one manufacturer has moved to the state to build them; reportedly, it now employs hundreds of people. Second, if public officials later felt this authority should be restricted again--perhaps because a 16-foot-wide contributes to a serious traffic accident--the State Transportation Commission may order MDOT to immediately cease issuing permits for them to be moved and notify jurisdictional authorities of this change in policy. Some may object to the lifting of the sunset in light of a report issued in 1992 pertaining to the transport of wider mobile homes, which suggests this practice may pose a safety hazard in some traffic situations. However, any decision on whether to allow 16-foot-wides to be transported in Michigan 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 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 of the towing vehicle and rear of the home that said, "16-ft wide load." And finally, the bill would require representatives of the mobile home manufacturing industry to develop an escort vehicle driver training program which the Truck Safety Commission would have to approve before the end of 1994. These additional requirements would help both to warn drivers who approach mobile homes in tow to do so with caution and ensure that drivers of towing vehicles were properly trained in all aspects relating to the safe transport of these massive vehicles.

#### ***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 April of 1993 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. 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, statistically, mobile homes in transport present no greater degree of danger on Michigan roadways than other motor vehicles; in fact, they may pose a smaller traffic hazard considering all the safety precautions that must be taken (and that the bill would require) when they're moved.

#### ***Against:***

Under its contract with the Department of Transportation, the University of Michigan Transportation Research Institute issued a report in May of 1992 on the transport of mobile homes wider than 14 feet, which suggests that moving 16-foot-wide mobile homes presents a significant highway safety risk. The risks of moving larger structures 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 them. 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.

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; and

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