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BILL ANALYSIS

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Senate Bill 435 (Substitute S-1 as reported)
Sponsor: Senator Walter H. North
Committee: Transportation and Tourism

Date Completed: 6-14-01

RATIONALE

Overweight trucks can jeopardize the safety of motorists and contribute to the deterioration of freeways, secondary roads, and bridges. All trucks are governed by size, weight, and load restrictions established by Federal, State, and local governmental agencies. Some roadways are classified as seasonal routes and are subject to stricter load limits on dates determined by the Michigan Department of Transportation, in order to minimize road damage during freeze-thaw cycles. The consequences of exceeding the legal weight limit can include fines and citations.

Apparently, there have been some cases in which salt trucks performing winter road maintenance operations have been issued warnings by local law enforcement authorities for exceeding the weight limit on certain roadways. Some people believe that vehicles performing necessary operations such as winter road maintenance and emergency repair should be exempt from the weight restrictions.

CONTENT

The bill would amend Chapter 6 (Obedience to and Effect of Traffic Laws) of the Michigan Vehicle Code to specify that the chapter's provisions governing the weight of vehicles would not apply to vehicles owned by a county road commission when the vehicles were used in the performance of winter road maintenance operations and emergency maintenance or repair work, or to the owner of a vehicle or vehicles under contract with the State, a county road commission or the designated county road agency, a city, or a village, when the vehicles were used in conjunction with the performance of work on a highway, road, or street.

MCL 257.603

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

By exempting certain vehicles used in winter road maintenance and emergency repair from weight restrictions, the bill would allow necessary operations such as plowing, salting, and repairing the roadways to be performed, in order to provide safe roadways. Although weight limits help promote safety and preserve road surface conditions, the restrictions should not hinder the accessibility of roadways. Apparently, there have been some cooperative efforts between the Department of Transportation and the State Police to waive the weight limits for certain vehicles, but overweight vehicles still might be stopped and ticketed by local police officers. The bill would prevent this from happening.

Legislative Analyst: N. Nagata

FISCAL IMPACT

To the extent that the proposed exemptions would reduce tickets and fines, local revenues would decrease. It is unknown how many vehicles have been ticketed for a violation of weight restrictions.

Fiscal Analyst: C. Thiel

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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.