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BILL ANALYSIS

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Senate Bill 1127 (Substitute S-1 as reported)
Sponsor: Senator Valde Garcia
Committee: Transportation

Date Completed: 6-8-06

RATIONALE

The Michigan Vehicle Code indicates that the left lane on a freeway is for passing only. Specifically, upon a roadway with two or more lanes for travel in one direction, a motorist must drive in the extreme right-hand lane available for travel, except as otherwise provided, and may drive in any lane lawfully available to traffic moving in the same direction when the lanes are occupied by vehicles moving in substantially continuous lanes of traffic. A driver may drive in the left lane when overtaking and passing another vehicle proceeding in the same direction.

Despite these provisions, motorists frequently drive in the left lane when they are not passing other vehicles, unaware that they are breaking the law. It has been suggested that the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) be required to post signs along limited access highways in the State to notify motorists that the left lane is for passing and the right lane is for driving.

CONTENT

The bill would amend Public Act 205 of 1941, which governs limited access highways, to require MDOT to post on each four-lane limited access highway subject to the Act that the Department considered an appropriate highway for sign placement, signs indicating that the right lane of a four-lane limited access highway is for driving and the left lane is for passing.

The signs would have to be placed at the Michigan border of each four-lane limited access highway subject to the Act and at other locations of each four-lane limited

access highway subject to the Act that the Department considered appropriate. The Department would have to determine the size and design of the signs.

MCL 252.52

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

The signs required by the bill would help publicize the State law designating the left lane of a limited access highway a lane for passing only. Evidently, many motorists are unaware that they can be ticketed for impeding traffic by occupying the leftmost lane while not passing another vehicle, even when obeying the posted speed limit.

Misuse of the left lane of a freeway can result in bottlenecks and encourage dangerous driving practices, such as tailgating and excessive braking, which can lead to accidents and incidents of road rage. The proposed signs would encourage drivers to leave the left lane open for vehicles that were moving more quickly, facilitating the smoother flow of traffic and enhancing safety for all vehicles.

Response: Although the encouragement of proper use of the left lane is a worthwhile goal, there are several concerns that should be taken into consideration. The Transportation Department already is facing the costs of new signs that reflect the increased truck speed limit that will go into effect on

November 9, 2006. The bill would result in additional costs to MDOT.

In another matter, there are numerous traffic laws of which motorists are unaware or that they disregard. The bill would open the door for requirements that MDOT post signs notifying drivers of these other laws, as well.

Legislative Analyst: Julie Koval

FISCAL IMPACT

The bill would cost the State an indeterminate amount depending on the number and size of road signs the State Transportation Department determined were necessary. The costs for the signs would be paid by the State Trunkline Fund.

Fiscal Analyst: Jessica Runnels

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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.