



Senate Fiscal Agency
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BILL ANALYSIS



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Senate Bill 1525 (Substitute S-1 as reported)
Sponsor: Senator Jud Gilbert, II
Committee: Transportation

Date Completed: 9-29-08

RATIONALE

Michigan's climate puts significant stress on the State's roads and highways, particularly during the freeze and thaw cycles in the spring. During that period, the ground beneath the road softens as the frost subsides, and roads are more susceptible to damage from heavy vehicles. To help reduce the damage done while the roads are in that weak state, the Michigan Vehicle Code provides for reduced vehicle weight limits during the months of March, April, and May. The dates when the restrictions apply are subject to modification by the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) or a local road agency, which may suspend the limits and impose them at other times based on road conditions. Also, the seasonal weight restrictions do not apply on some designated roads that are built with deep gravel bases to withstand heavy vehicle loads during the spring thaw.

Because the particular dates vary from year to year and only some roads are affected, there evidently has been some confusion about when and where the reduced weight limits are in effect. It has been suggested that posting seasonal weight limit information on the websites of MDOT and local road commissions would ensure that the information was readily available to those who need to transport heavy loads during the spring months.

CONTENT

The bill would amend the Michigan Vehicle Code to require the Michigan Department of Transportation and each local authority with highways and streets under its jurisdiction subject to seasonal vehicle weight

restrictions prescribed in the Code to post the following information on the homepage of its website:

- The dates when the seasonal restrictions are in effect.
- The names of the highways and streets and portions of highways and streets to which the seasonal restrictions apply.

The Code prescribes maximum axle loads and gross vehicle weights for various configurations of vehicles. During the months of March, April, and May, the maximum axle load allowable on concrete pavements or pavements with a concrete base must be reduced by 25% from the specified maximum load, and by 35% on all other types of roads. Additionally, the maximum wheel load may not exceed 525 pounds per inch of tire width on concrete and concrete base or 450 pounds per inch of tire width on all other roads while the seasonal road restrictions are in effect.

The Department, or a local authority with respect to highways under its jurisdiction, may suspend the restrictions when and where the conditions of the highways or other factors warrant suspension, and may impose the restrictions at any other time that the conditions of the highway require.

MCL 257.722

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

Construction companies, timber haulers, agricultural operators, and others often must transport heavy loads on Michigan's roads and highways in the normal course of conducting their business. Although most are willing to comply with the reduced weight limits in order to protect Michigan's roads during the spring thaw, some have complained that it can be difficult to obtain up-to-date and accurate local information on effective dates and the specific roads that are affected. While some county road commissions take steps to notify citizens when and where the seasonal restrictions will take effect by posting signs on roadways, placing notices in newspapers, or posting information on the county road commission website, those notification procedures are not consistently applied across the State. The bill would require information on when and where seasonal weight restrictions are in effect to be posted on each local road commission's website and on the MDOT website, so business owners and others would have ready access to the information, helping to reduce confusion and prevent unintentional violations of the reduced weight limits.

Legislative Analyst: Curtis Walker

FISCAL IMPACT

The bill would have no fiscal impact on State or local government.

Fiscal Analyst: Debra Hollon

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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.