

SUBJECT: Higher truck speed limits on rural highways

COMMITTEE: Transportation — favorable, without amendment

VOTE: 5 ayes — Alexander, Edwards, Hamric, Noriega, Uher
1 nay — Hill
3 absent — Siebert, Y. Davis, Hawley

WITNESSES: For — Todd Spencer, Owner-Operator Independent Drivers Association;
Clifford Floeck
Against — None

BACKGROUND: Current law allows specific vehicles to travel at 70 miles per hour (mph) during the day and 65 mph at night on numbered highways outside an urban district. The speed limits for semitrailer trucks and other large trucks outside an urban district are 60 mph during the day and 55 mph at night.

DIGEST: HB 676 would allow any type of vehicle to travel at 70 mph during the day and 65 mph at night on a numbered highway outside an urban district. It would allow any type of vehicle to travel at 60 mph during the day and 55 mph at night on a non-numbered highway outside an urban district. Any type of vehicle except a school bus could travel at 60 mph outside an urban district except as otherwise specified.

This bill would take effect September 1, 1999.

SUPPORTERS SAY: HB 676 would make the speed limit the same for automobiles and trucks on Texas highways, creating a safer driving atmosphere. It is natural for trucks to move at the same speed as surrounding traffic. Accidents occur more often when trucks are required to travel at a slower speed than other vehicles around them, according to a U.S. Department of Transportation report.

Truck drivers are the safest motorists on the road, because if they get too many tickets, no company will hire them. They keep careful log books of hours they have driven and have been awake, and they have training and

experience that most motorists do not have.

A long line of passenger vehicles often forms behind a truck on a two-lane highway if the truck driver is driving at the speed limit. If trucks had the same speed limit as other vehicles, trucks would be less likely to hold up traffic.

No states surrounding Texas have speed differentials. When truckers cross into Texas from other states, their speed should remain consistent with that of other traffic, but it does not. Texas requires trucks to reduce their speed by 10 mph or more, much slower than the flow of passenger traffic. Only 11 other states have speed differentials, and three of those states are considering legislation to abolish them.

OPPONENTS
SAY:

Even though the truck speed limit is now 60 mph, most trucks go at least 70 mph. If the truck speed limit rose to 70 mph, many might go as fast as 80 mph.

Truck drivers generally are safe drivers, but even a safe driver may not be able to stop in time to avoid an accident. Trucks take three times the distance to stop as passenger cars take. If a truck is coming over a hill and a slow-moving school bus or farm vehicle is on the other side, a large truck needs more time and space to brake. It is logical to require heavy, large vehicles to travel more slowly on highways so they can slow down or stop in case of an accident. If a speeding truck brakes too hard, the truck will jackknife. If the speed limit were raised even higher, to 75 mph or even 80 mph, the problem would be compounded.

Truckers are paid by the mile. To make more money, they must drive more miles, and the surest way to do that is to go faster. Increasing the speed limit for trucks would not reflect concern for the safety of all drivers but only for the money-making considerations of a trucker's job.

New Mexico is considering a bill that would lower the truck speed limit from 75 mph to 65 mph, while the passenger vehicle limit would remain at 75 mph. New Mexico understands that slowing vehicles down reduces the rate of death and serious injuries on highways.

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NOTES:

A related bill, HB 3328 by Gallego, which would raise the speed limit on rural highways to 75 mph and to 80 mph on east-west interstate highways through counties with a population under 25,000, passed the House on second reading yesterday. During House consideration of HB 3328, Rep. Isett offered an amendment to add the provisions of HB 676, but withdrew the amendment.