

SUBJECT: Updating vehicle stop-lamp and turn-signal lighting equipment requirements

COMMITTEE: Transportation — favorable, with amendment

VOTE: 7 ayes — Krusee, Phillips, Garza, Hamric, Harper-Brown, Laney, Mercer

0 nays

2 absent — Edwards, Hill

SENATE VOTE: On final passage, May 1 — 31-0, on Local and Uncontested Calendar

WITNESSES: No public hearing

BACKGROUND: Transportation Code, ch. 547, subch. E contains general vehicle lighting requirements. Secs. 547.323 and 547.324 contain stop-lamp and turn-signal lamp requirements, respectively. The Department of Public Safety (DPS) enforces state traffic safety laws and federal motor vehicle regulations.

DIGEST: SB 1715 would add subsections requiring vehicles to have stop-lamps and turn-signal lamps conforming to DPS rules and federal standards.

Centrally located, high-mounted stop-lamps would be required on passenger cars built or assembled after the 1986 model year and on multi-purpose passenger vehicles, trucks, or buses built or assembled after the 1994 model year that are less than 80 inches wide with gross weight ratings less than 10,000 pounds. The observable illuminated areas of stop-lamps and turn-signal lamps could not be smaller than what is allowed by DPS rules or federal standards.

Stop-lamps would have to be displayed only when service brakes were applied and continuously as long as brakes were applied.

The bill would take effect September 1, 2003.

SUPPORTERS SAY: State law on vehicle lighting equipment has remained virtually unchanged since 1971. SB 1715 would conform state safety light and inspection

requirements to manufacturers' specifications, DPS rules, and federal standards. Cars have come equipped with centrally located, high-mounted stop-lamps since the mid-1980s, and these requirements have been in place since the mid-1990s for vans, trucks, and sport-utility vehicles. These lights are not mentioned in statute, and some motorists disconnect or obscure them. Also, some motorists are using stop and signal lights smaller than required, often due to light covers, which could be unsafe. Clarification of brake light illumination is needed for state inspection purposes.

The bill would strike a balance between maintaining uniformity and accommodating customization. Banning all non-regulation lighting, including innocuous decorative lights, is unnecessary and could interfere with taxicabs, custom car shows, parades, and other automotive events. At night, more light generally is better than less. Any lighting that increases vehicles' visibility and roadway illumination, within reasonable limits, should enhance safety and help reduce accidents.

**OPPONENTS
SAY:**

Flashers, tracers, and other types of federally unregulated, after-market cosmetic lighting should not be allowed on vehicles operating on Texas roadways, as stipulated by the Senate version of SB 1715. Depending on their color, flashing lights can give drivers the false impression that they are being stopped by law enforcement officers or approached by emergency vehicles. This confusion could cause them to slow down suddenly or pull off the road, possibly endangering themselves and other motorists needlessly. Older drivers not used to seeing these kinds of vehicle lighting could become distracted and lose control of their vehicles. Motorists already have enough externalities to deal with; they do not need them compounded by unfamiliar lighting that serves no useful purpose.

**OTHER
OPPONENTS
SAY:**

SB 1715 should retain the decorative light ban that existed in the Senate version, with exceptions for taxis, parade vehicles, and off-road uses such as car shows and contests.

NOTES:

The committee amendment would delete a provision in the Senate engrossed version that would prohibit non-requisite decorative or ancillary lighting, such

as “chasers,” flashing lights around license plates, and neon undercarriage illumination.