

SUBJECT: School bus speed limits for transporting students for extracurricular activities

COMMITTEE: Transportation — committee substitute recommended

VOTE: 8 ayes — Alexander, Siebert, Y. Davis, Edwards, Hamric, Hawley, Hill, Uher
0 nays
1 absent — Noriega

WITNESSES: For — James Haynes, Plains Independent School District; Ervin Huddleston, Andrews Independent School District; Maxie Watts, Wink-Loving Independent School District
Against — David Bolles, Texas Association for Pupil Transportation

BACKGROUND: Transportation Code, sec. 545.352(b)(5) limits school buses to a maximum speed of 55 miles per hour on interstate highways and 50 miles per hour on all other highways.

DIGEST: CSHB 385 would allow school buses transporting students for extracurricular activities to observe the same maximum speed limit that is legal for passenger cars at the same time and location. School districts would be responsible for establishing speed limits for each type of bus used by the district. The speed limit for any bus could not exceed the maximum speed limit for passenger cars on a given road at a given time.

The bill would take effect September 1, 1999.

SUPPORTERS SAY: Students and teachers in sparsely populated areas of the state often have to travel several hours to attend extracurricular activities. CSHB 385 would allow students and teachers to save considerable time in traveling to and from these activities.

The bill is permissive and based on local control. School districts should have the option of raising the speed limit for some of their buses if they choose to do so. The bill would not require any school district to raise school bus speed limits. Currently, buses that are chartered by school districts may travel at

speeds equivalent to those of passenger cars. School districts should have the same option for their own buses as well.

Many of the buses used by school districts are designed to travel at higher speeds than the law allows, without compromising the safety of passengers or of other motorists. School districts are careful to use an appropriate type of bus for long-distance extracurricular trips. They should have the authority to set appropriate speed limits based on the type of bus being used.

School bus drivers are capable of safely driving faster than the law now allows if the school district determines that the buses they are driving are safe at higher speeds. Drivers who transport students for extracurricular activities receive the same training given to professional intercity bus drivers.

OPPONENTS
SAY:

Increasing the speed limit for school buses could increase the number of accidents involving school buses and the number of injuries and fatalities to school bus passengers and other motorists. Children's safety could be compromised by an increase in school bus speed limits.

The bill would not prevent school districts from raising the speed limit for all of their buses, including yellow buses that may not be safe to travel at speeds equivalent to those of passenger cars. Law enforcement officers could have difficulty determining if a bus was speeding because they would not know if the bus was transporting students for an extracurricular activity.

Many extracurricular school bus drivers do not have the same experience as other professional bus drivers. Allowing these drivers to drive faster than the current law allows might not be in the best interests of student safety.

NOTES:

The committee substitute added the requirement that school districts establish speed limits for each type of bus used by the district.

A related bill, HB 3328 by Gallego, which would raise the maximum 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.