

SUBJECT: Designating highway passing lanes

COMMITTEE: Transportation — committee substitute recommended

VOTE: 5 ayes — Alexander, Siebert, Finnell, Hawley, Uher
0 nays
1 present, not voting — Hartnett
3 absent — Edwards, Hill, Pickett

WITNESSES: None

DIGEST: CSHB 297 would require that highway signs directing slower traffic to use a lane other than the farthest left lane read “left lane for passing only.”

The bill would take effect September 1, 1997, and apply only to signs originally placed, replaced, or repainted on a highway on or after the effective date.

SUPPORTERS SAY: CSHB 297 would help clarify rules of the road on state highways. Currently, highway signs use a variety of different phrases to convey the message that drivers keep to the right unless passing in order to facilitate the flow of traffic. This is not a minor problem; the confusion impedes traffic patterns and creates uncertainty among motorists. Traffic signs and signals should be clear and unambiguous. The Texas Transportation Commission now is drafting a manual on and specifications for a uniform system of traffic control devices for use on state highways. CSHB 297 would complement this effort.

The bill would not require new expenditures to replace existing signs; the language would be required only on new signs. Furthermore, it would not require signs to be placed where there currently are none but only stipulate the language to be used if a sign were erected. Urban highways would not have to provide that left lanes be reserved for passing.

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OPPONENTS SAY: CSHB 297 is unnecessary and would have little positive effect upon the conduct of drivers in Texas. In major metropolitan areas, traffic congestion at peak rush hour times is so severe that passing in any lane is a moot concept. In fact, in high-traffic urban areas like Houston, Dallas, or San Antonio, such a direction could present its own set of hazards to motorists, since all traffic lanes are required to maintain a regular flow of traffic.

NOTES: The committee substitute stipulated that the bill would apply only to new signs and set the effective date.