

SUBJECT: Speed limits for vehicles towing certain trailers

COMMITTEE: Transportation — committee substitute recommended

VOTE: 7 ayes — Alexander, Siebert, Edwards, Finnell, Hawley, Hill, Pickett

0 nays

2 absent — Hartnett, Uher

SENATE VOTE: On final passage, March 11 — 31-0

WITNESSES: None

BACKGROUND : The Transportation Code establishes a 45 mile per hour (mph) highway speed limit for vehicles towing house trailers heavier than 4,500 pounds or longer than 32 feet. Vehicles towing house trailers under these dimensions, as well as trailers, semitrailers, and other motor vehicles, are permitted highway speeds of 60 mph during the day and 55 mph at night. House trailers are exempted from a provision restricting motor vehicles to 45 feet in length. The combination of a house trailer and a motor vehicle may not exceed 65 feet.

The code defines house trailer as a trailer or semitrailer that is designed, constructed, and equipped as a permanent or temporary dwelling or sleeping place or has a chassis and exterior shell designed and constructed for such purposes but is being used for a commercial purpose.

DIGEST: CSSB 343 would redefine house trailer as a trailer, other than a towable recreational vehicle, that is transportable on a highway in one or more sections; less than 40 feet long while traveling; built on a permanent chassis; designed to be used as a dwelling or for commercial purposes when connected to required utilities; and includes plumbing, heating, air conditioning, and electrical systems.

The bill also would provide a new definition for towable recreational vehicle (TRV) as a nonmotorized vehicle designed to be towable by a motor vehicle for temporary human habitation, including recreational camping or seasonal

usage and permanently built on a single chassis. TRVs could contain life-support systems and be used permanently or temporarily for advertising, selling, displaying, or promoting merchandise or services.

The bill would delete the provisions limiting vehicles to certain speeds based on the size and weight of the house trailer they were towing. House trailers, like manufactured housing, could not be towed in excess of the posted speed limit or 55 mph, whichever was less. TRVs would be included in the provision providing for 60 and 55 mph speeds for vehicles towing trailers and semitrailers.

The length limitations applicable to house trailers would apply as well to TRVs.

CSSB 343 also would establish lawful speeds for other vehicles: passenger cars or light trucks towing a trailer carrying a watercraft less than 26 feet long could travel 70 mph by day and 65 mph by night on highways outside urban districts. School buses would be restricted to 50 mph on non-interstate highways and 55 mph on interstate highways

The bill would take effect September 1, 1997.

**SUPPORTERS
SAY:**

CSSB 343 would correct inconsistencies in speed limits established for certain vehicles. Since the Transportation Code lacks a specific definition of towable recreational vehicles, these vehicles are sometimes treated as manufactured housing, which is not meant for highway travel and is limited to a lower speed because of weight and size. Law enforcement officers also tend to confuse TRVs with house trailers, which also may be subject to different motor vehicle regulations. Since more TRV traffic generally means more tourism revenues, the state should not inhibit tourist travel with needless confusion over proper speed limits. CSSB 343 would clear up the confusion and any attendant problems with tourist traffic by establishing specific definitions for both house trailers and TRVs.

**OPPONENTS
SAY:**

This increase in speed limits may be too large with regard to boats and other vessels being towed on state highways, given the wide range of driving experience and skill of some of their drivers. Under certain conditions, the use of such a wide range of speed limits, from 50 to 70 miles per hour on

highways, could increase the possibility of accidents occurring. Additional caution must be used when trailers, boats, or other recreational vehicles are being towed, and the necessary level of skill of these drivers must be even higher than that required of passenger car operators or the commercial drivers of smaller trucks and trailers. A 70 mph speed limit for many drivers towing a boat on the highway would be too high, considering the potential for damage to people or property should an accident occur.

NOTES:

The Senate-passed version of the bill defined TRVs, established speed limits of 65 mph during the day and 60 mph at night for vehicles towing TRVs, and permitted school buses to travel 55 mph on interstate highways.

CSSB 343 would blend HB 995 by Brimer, the original companion to SB 343, concerning TRVs, and HB 869 by Hirschi, concerning house trailers.