



Senate Fiscal Agency
P. O. Box 30036
Lansing, Michigan 48909-7536

BILL ANALYSIS



Telephone: (517) 373-5383
Fax: (517) 373-1986

Senate Bill 500 (as enrolled)
 Sponsor: Senator Walter H. North
 Senate Committee: Transportation and Tourism
 House Committee: Transportation

PUBLIC ACT 105 of 1995

Date Completed: 6-28-95

RATIONALE

The Soo Locks Tour Trains have operated in the Sault Ste. Marie area since 1963, providing a 15-mile tour of the city's historic sections and then crossing the International Bridge, which gives passengers a view of the locks. Each of the four "trains" consists of a Jeep designed to look like a typical locomotive engine, pulling four nonmotorized trailers that seat a total of approximately 48 passengers. Reportedly, similar touring vehicles either operate or have operated in other areas of the State, such as Frankenmuth and Greenfield Village. Although the Michigan Vehicle Code permits various combinations of vehicles (e.g., one truck tractor plus two semitrailers), the Code has not specifically regulated the type of vehicle combination used by the Soo Locks Tour Trains. To ensure the continued safe operation of these vehicles, it was suggested that provisions governing them should be added to the Vehicle Code.

CONTENT

The bill amended the Michigan Vehicle Code to provide that a truck may be used to haul up to four semitrailers in order to transport passengers for sightseeing purposes, with the approval of the local unit of government in which the truck is to be operated. The truck may not be operated more than three miles beyond the boundaries of that local unit, and may not exceed a speed of 25 miles per hour. The truck and semitrailers must be equipped with hazard warning letters, and slow-moving vehicle emblems as described in the Code; be equipped with safety belts for each individual seat within one year after the bill's effective date; and meet any applicable Federal safety standards. The truck and semitrailers also must be inspected annually by the Department of State Police. A driver of the truck must secure the

proper group vehicle designation and endorsement required on his or her operator's or chauffeur's license before operating the truck.

The bill applies notwithstanding provisions of the Code regulating vehicle combinations.

MCL 257.719c

ARGUMENTS

(Please note: The arguments contained in this analysis originate from sources outside the Senate Fiscal Agency. The Senate Fiscal Agency neither supports nor opposes legislation.)

Supporting Argument

The Soo Locks Tour Trains help draw people and their dollars to the Sault Ste. Marie area. This service evidently has operated safely for over 30 years and has experienced no accidents related to the vehicles' hitching mechanism. Reportedly, each trailer already is equipped with seat belts and has a braking mechanism and the Department of State Police has inspected the vehicles for the last two years, finding only one violation regarding a hitch. In addition, this type of vehicle combination is more maneuverable than one long semitrailer would be, as well as less damaging to city streets. By statutorily limiting the speed of these vehicles and mandating State Police inspections, warning letters, slow-moving vehicle emblems, and safety belts, the bill will ensure that the Soo Locks Tour Trains continue to protect the safety of their passengers and other vehicles on the road. The bill's regulations also will apply to similar touring vehicles that may operate elsewhere in the State.

Opposing Argument

Although a limit of three miles outside a local unit's boundaries appears reasonable (and allows the

Soo Locks Tour Trains to cross the International Bridge and turn around on the other side), this actually permits a touring vehicle to cover a sizable piece of geography. While the traffic patterns around Sault Ste. Marie might accommodate a slow-moving, multiple-part touring vehicle, this sort of vehicle combination could present a hazard in more congested parts of the State, such as Dearborn or Grand Rapids.

Response: Reportedly, the three-mile limit was suggested by the Department of State Police.

Legislative Analyst: S. Margules

FISCAL IMPACT

The bill would have no fiscal impact on State or local government.

Fiscal Analyst: B. Bowerman

A9596\S500A

This analysis was prepared by nonpartisan Senate staff for use by the Senate in its deliberations and does not constitute an official statement of legislative intent.