



House
Legislative
Analysis
Section
Olds Plaza Building, 10th Floor
Lansing, Michigan 48909
Phone: 517/373-6466

STROBE LIGHTS ON BUSES AND FUNERAL VEHICLES

House Bill 4051 with committee amendments First Analysis (5-13-97)

Sponsor: Rep. David Anthony
Committee: Transportation

THE APPARENT PROBLEM:

The Michigan Vehicle Code contains several provisions regarding flashing, rotating, or oscillating lights on vehicles, the type that are commonly called strobe lights. In general, these lights are prohibited except under certain conditions specified in the act, such as when used on an emergency vehicle, or on a motor vehicle escorting an oversize load. However, it has been pointed out that public safety would be better served if certain other vehicles were permitted to use these lights. For example, in inclement weather, such lights would serve as a signal to approaching traffic that a bus had stopped. It has also been suggested that funeral hearses, which are currently allowed to use flashing amber lights, be allowed the additional option of using rotating or oscillating lights of different colors in order to signal their presence to oncoming traffic.

THE CONTENT OF THE BILL:

The bill would amend the Michigan Vehicle Code to permit a public transit vehicle or a lead vehicle in a funeral procession to be equipped with a strobe light.

A public transit vehicle (a bus) could be equipped with a flashing, oscillating, or rotating light, which would be activated by the driver only when boarding or discharging passengers, in inclement weather such as fog, rain, or snow, from one-half hour before sunset until one-half hour after sunrise, or where conditions hindered the vehicle's visibility. Under the bill, the light would have to be mounted on the roof, approximately six feet from the rear of the vehicle, and display a white light to the front, side, and rear of the vehicle. As used in the bill, "public transit vehicle" would mean a motor vehicle, other than a station wagon or passenger van, with a manufacturer's rated seating capacity of 16 or more passengers and a gross vehicle weight rating of more than 10,000 pounds.

The act currently specifies that a hearse or funeral coach may be equipped with a flashing amber light. The bill would specify, instead, that a vehicle that was part of a funeral procession could be equipped with flashing,

rotating, or oscillating purple or amber lights. However, the lights could not be activated except during a funeral procession.

MCL 257.698

FISCAL IMPLICATIONS:

According to the Department of Transportation, the fiscal impact of the bill is unknown. (5-9-97)

ARGUMENTS:

For:

The provisions of the bill would allow certain vehicles to be equipped with safety equipment similar to that now permitted for school buses. In some parts of the state, the weather can be dangerous at times. For example, in the Upper Peninsula, a day might start out sunny and warm, but by afternoon the temperature could drop by 20 degrees, and it might be foggy. The fog presents a danger to approaching drivers when buses come to a stop. The use of flashing lights on buses in these situations would provide a cautionary warning to drivers approaching them and protection for bus drivers and passengers.

The bill would also allow a vehicle that was part of a funeral procession to be equipped with purple or amber strobes. It is customary for traffic to stop at intersections to allow funeral processions to pass. The use of an amber and purple flasher on a car that was part of a funeral procession would help to warn nearby drivers to use caution when approaching situations where traffic is slowed or stopped, which, in turn, would help protect the occupants of such vehicles.

Response:

The bill would allow vehicles taking part in funeral processions to use purple or amber strobes. The color purple is not one that has previously been permitted on vehicles before, and the Department of State Police has

House Bill 4051 (5-13-97)

expressed concern that its use would serve only to confuse the public.

Against:

The provisions of the bill would apply to buses that had, among other requirements, a rated seating capacity of 16 or more passengers. However, many buses, including some that are used to transport schoolchildren, have only an 8-passenger capacity, and, under the bill, could not be equipped with strobe lights. The bill should be amended to include these smaller buses.

POSITIONS:

The Department of Transportation has no position on the bill. (5-9-97)

The Marquette County Transit Authority (MARQTRAN) supports the bill. (5-9-97)

Analyst: R. Young

■ This analysis was prepared by nonpartisan House staff for use by House members in their deliberations, and does not constitute an official statement of legislative intent.