



Oregon

John A. Kitzhaber, M.D., Governor

Department of Transportation

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DATE: May 16, 2013

TO: Senate Committee on Business and Transportation

FROM: Matthew L. Garrett
Director

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SUBJECT: HB 2265—Photo Radar Speed Enforcement in Highway Work Zones

INTRODUCTION

House Bill 2265 would continue and expand the use of a critical safety tool by the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT). The bill would lift the sunset on the use of photo radar speed enforcement in highway work zones, and allow its use on interstate highways. The current bill also would allow its use when workers are not present, but a proposed amendment would limit that use to areas where the roadway configuration has temporarily changed to perform the work. This is an effective safety tool that should be made permanent and expanded to areas where and it can save lives.

BACKGROUND

Hundreds of work zones are in place on state highways throughout Oregon every year. Highway work zones can be hazardous, congested sections of highway. The nature of a work zone can include narrow lanes, minimal shoulders, sharp curves, and other features that typically are not present. ODOT takes a variety of steps to improve safety in these areas. The department and our partners in the private construction community sometimes can put work areas behind barriers to separate workers from traffic. We ensure that signs and lane markings are clear so drivers know the zone is coming and what is expected of them. Sometimes we post lower speeds through work zones to protect both workers and motorists.

The latter step does not have as much effect as it should despite warning signs, flashing lights, and message boards. Reducing speeds in work zones requires enforcement. The visibility of a law enforcement officer on patrol is the most effective deterrent for speeders. Every year ODOT pays hundreds of thousands of dollars to law enforcement agencies for overtime speed enforcement in work zones. But there are limits on the number of officers available for such enforcement, even with subsidized overtime.

Every year Oregon averages about 500 work zone crashes, and nine work zone fatalities. National data demonstrates that those most at risk in a work zone are not the construction workers and flaggers, but those in the vehicles travelling through the zone—often going too fast.

The 2007 Legislature allowed ODOT to use photo radar speed enforcement in highway work zones. Law enforcement, either Oregon State Police or a local agency already authorized in statute to run photo radar, would operate the system. Signs must be posted well ahead of the installation to warn drivers they were approaching photo enforcement. A digital sign showing the vehicle's actual speed must be posted at or ahead of the installation. And a uniformed officer, in a marked police vehicle, must be on scene operating the photo radar unit. The legislature prohibited use of this tool on interstates or in any work zone when workers are not present. The ability to use this tool will sunset at the end of 2014.

ODOT's pilot project on U.S. 30 at Yeon Avenue in Portland yielded impressive results: 23% reduction in speeding vehicles during times when photo enforcement was in use.

DISCUSSION

HB 2265 would lift the sunset on the ability for ODOT to use photo radar speed enforcement in work zones. The bill also would allow its use on interstates, where ODOT and its contractors do the majority of our work and where speeds are highest. ODOT has worked with members and assisted in drafting an amendment that constrains the use of photo radar when workers are not present to only those areas where the roadway has been temporarily changed, such as by reducing lane width, requiring a lane change, narrowing a shoulder, etc.

The amendment ensures that this tool would be used, when workers are not present, only in those areas that present changes and increased risk to the motoring public. Lifting the sunset puts this tool in the set of viable options to ensure safe work zones for all Oregonians.

CONCLUSION

HB 2265 will allow ODOT to continue using a proven safety mechanism, and to expand its use to those places and times when it is most needed.

Attachments: Work Zone Graphic
 Photographs

U.S. 30: Yeon Avenue Portland

ENTERING
WORK
ZONE



PHOTO RADAR UNIT
OPERATED BY A
UNIFORMED POLICE
OFFICER FROM A
MARKED POLICE
VEHICLE

I-5: Iowa Street Viaduct



I-5: Iowa Street Viaduct

