



# Oregon

Kate Brown, Governor

Department of Transportation

Director's Office

355 Capitol St. NE, MS 11

Salem, OR 97301

**DATE:** April 3, 2015

**TO:** House Committee on Transportation and Economic Development

**FROM:** Troy Costales, Administrator  
ODOT Transportation Safety Division

**SUBJECT:** House Bill 3402 – Increase Speeds

## INTRODUCTION

House Bill 3402 would increase speeds for both trucks and passenger vehicles on specific sections of eastern Oregon interstate and state highways. Increasing speed limits results in additional fatalities and serious injury crashes. In rural areas, emergency services available to respond to serious crashes are not as readily available.

## BACKGROUND

ODOT has statutory authority to establish speeds in Oregon on state, county and city roads. The Oregon Transportation Commission, as the department's rulemaking body, establishes speeds based on recommendations from ODOT and the Oregon Speed Zone Review Panel (made up of representatives from ODOT, cities, counties, Oregon Transportation Safety Committee and Oregon State Police).

The Oregon Speed Zone Review Panel at the direction of the OTC conducted a review of speed limits on interstate routes in 2004, following a law change that allowed ODOT to establish speeds up to 70 mph for passenger vehicles and up to 65 mph for trucks on interstate highways. The review included a specific focus on whether to increase speeds on rural interstates. The Oregon Speed Zone Review Panel concluded the safety of motorists outweighed any benefit achieved in raising the speed limit on rural interstates. Oregon's good safety record was compelling evidence to retain the current speed limit. The OTC chose to retain the standard of 65 mph for passenger vehicles and 55 mph for trucks on most of the interstate system, including rural interstates.

## DISCUSSION

House Bill 3402 would change the speeds on segments of Interstate 84, US 95, US 20, US 197 and US 97 in eastern Oregon to 65 mph for trucks and 75 mph for passenger vehicles. The bill removes the department's authority to designate a lower speed on Interstate 84 from east of The Dalles to the Idaho state line, except in a work zone.

The bill also removes the department's authority to establish any speed other than 65 mph for cars and 55 mph for trucks on interstate highways, except for designating a lower speed in a work zone. This means that Interstate 5, even through the Portland metro area (including the Terwilliger curves) would have a speed of 65 mph. The bill continues to allow the department to

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designate a speed lower than 55 mph on a state highway if a speed zone investigation determines it is appropriate.

ODOT is concerned that raising speeds will increase the number of serious and fatal injury crashes in the state, especially in rural parts of the state where emergency services are not readily available. There is also a concern about transporting an injured person to a level 1 trauma center (Portland – OHSU or Emanuel); for serious injuries the “golden hour” comes into play for patient survivability.

Oregon’s continued progress toward zero deaths on our roadways due to traffic crashes can only be accomplished by efforts to reduce impaired driving, increased use of safety belts/car seats and appropriately managing travel speeds. In the last five years, 633 people have died and 25,027 people have been injured in crashes that were speed related on Oregon roadways. Speed and alcohol-impaired driving are essentially tied for Oregon’s top two fatal crash problems.

Oregon rate of fatalities for every 100 million vehicle miles travelled in 2008 was 1.24 and nationally, in 2008, the highway fatal rate was 1.25 fatal per 100 million vehicle miles travelled. In 2013, ODOT’s fatality rate dropped to 0.93, while the national rate was 1.09.

| State      | Rural Interstate Speed Limit | Fatality Rate (2008) | Fatalities (2008) | Fatality Rate (2013) | Fatalities (2013) |
|------------|------------------------------|----------------------|-------------------|----------------------|-------------------|
| Oregon     | 65 MPH                       | 1.24                 | 416               | 0.93                 | 313               |
| Colorado   | 75 MPH                       | 1.15                 | 548               | 1.02                 | 481               |
| Oklahoma   | 75 MPH                       | 1.54                 | 749               | 1.41                 | 678               |
| Idaho      | 75 MPH*                      | 1.52                 | 232               | 1.34                 | 214               |
| Texas      | 75 MPH*                      | 1.44                 | 3,382             | 1.38                 | 3,382             |
| Washington | 70 MPH                       | 0.94                 | 521               | 0.76                 | 436               |

\*Some segments are 80 in Idaho and 80 or 85 in Texas.

In 1996, Washington raised its speed limits for cars to 70 mph on sections of the interstate. In 1996 and 1997, they experienced an increase of 93 traffic deaths as compared to the years 1994 and 1995. Oregon, who chose not to raise speed limits to 70, experienced a decrease of 18 traffic deaths after comparing the two states both pre and post Washington’s speed limit change. It is also our understanding that Washington has significantly more trooper presence per state highway mile than does Oregon.

A Midwestern study was completed by the Iowa Speed Limit Task Force in 1997 which compared four states that increased speed limits above 65 mph against four states that did not raise their speed limits above 65 mph. Each state’s data was reviewed for 1995-1996 and compared against the year previous in order to compare them against each other directly. Kansas, Nebraska Missouri and South Dakota all raised their speed limits above 65 mph. After data review, traffic deaths increased in each of the four states by an average of 11.5% (Kansas, Nebraska and Missouri) to a high of 20.8% (South Dakota).

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The task force reviewed another four states that chose not to raise their speed limits above 65 mph. They were Illinois, Iowa, Minnesota and Wisconsin. After data review, these four states all had a decrease in traffic deaths. Illinois, Minnesota and Wisconsin averaged a 4% decrease while Iowa experienced a 17.9% decrease.

## **SUMMARY**

Statistics demonstrate that increasing speeds will result in an increase in serious and fatal injury crashes. HB 3402 would increase speeds on Oregon's interstate and state highways, and would remove the department's ability to set lower speeds on interstates except in work zones.