



Oregon

Kate Brown, Governor

Department of Transportation

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DATE: April 15, 2015

TO: Senate Committee on Business and Transportation

FROM: Troy Costales, Transportation Safety Division Administrator

SUBJECT: Senate Bill 459– Increase Interstate Speeds

INTRODUCTION

SB 459 would increase speeds for passenger vehicles and trucks on all interstate highways in Oregon. 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

Senate Bill 594 would change the speeds on all interstate highways for passenger vehicles to 70 mph and 60 mph for trucks; the bill does not change speeds on other highways. The bill retains the department's authority to establish speeds lower than 70 and 60 mph on interstates if lower speed is warranted following a traffic investigation. Existing sections of interstate highway that are posted at a lower speed such as the Myrtle Creek Curves and Siskiyou on I-5 in southern Oregon and the Terwilliger curves in Portland would remain posted at a lower speed.

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. The “golden hour” is the first hour after the occurrence of a traumatic injury, which is considered the most critical for successful emergency treatment and 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, with speed contributing to about 30% of all fatal crashes.

Oregon’s 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. Oregon and California have significantly more troopers present on their state highways than does Oregon.

State	Patrol Strength	Miles of Roadway Patrolled	Trooper Ratio
Washington	690	7,054	10.22
Oregon	334	7,983	23.90
California	5,835	106,396	18.23

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).

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. SB 459 would increase speeds on Oregon's interstate to 70 mph for passenger vehicles and 60 mph for trucks.