

65 mph limit passes committee, now goes before House for vote

By B.J. Thomsen
Of the Emerald

SALEM — Gov. Neil Goldschmidt's concern that the Legislature will raise the maximum speed limit on Oregon highways to 65 mph moved a step closer to reality Tuesday. House Bill 3147, which would eliminate the 55 mph speed limit, was unanimously passed out of the House Transportation Committee on Tuesday. The bill now goes before the full House.

The primary amendment made to the bill before it gained passage out of committee was the establishment of a uniform bail schedule for speeders on all roads in the state. The fines range from \$25, for exceeding the proposed limit by 5 mph, up to \$250 for traveling at speeds in excess of 85 mph.

Originally, a two-tiered bail schedule was proposed by Rep. Randy Miller, R-Clackamas, the primary sponsor of the bill. The bill would have established one set of fines for interstate highways and another set of less severe fines for secondary highways. Highway 99 is an example of a secondary highway.

Miller said he favors the two-tiered schedule because on Highway 99, for example, speeders would not only be fined for exceeding the speed limit but could also be fined \$250 for violation of the basic speed rule. The rule makes it illegal for motorists to travel beyond the speed deemed prudent by the arresting officer for current road conditions.

Richard Burbeck of the Oregon State Police said his agency favors a uniform bail schedule because officers in many parts of the state must

patrol both interstate highways and secondary highways. A two-tiered bail schedule may cause confusion, he said.

The first proposed amendment would have imposed a fine of \$100 on speeders traveling between 1-10 mph over 65.



Burbeck raised some concern about such a stiff penalty for that degree of violation of the speed limit. He said he believes some traffic officers would be reluctant to give such a large fine to people only going 1 mph over the limit. He also said the courts may be similarly reluctant to levy such stiff penalties on speeders going only a few miles over the speed limit.

Trucks and buses, however, still will be required to obey a 55 mph maximum speed on Oregon highways. And the current maximum speed limit will remain in effect for all highways and interstate highways inside urban areas with a population of 50,000 or more.

The bill has a good chance of gaining approval from the House, according to Miller, but he said he is uncertain how the Senate will receive the bill.

He remains optimistic, however, that the bill will be able to generate a majority of support in the Senate.

Sen. Jane Cease, D-Portland, chairwoman of the Senate Transportation Committee, has a different view of the bill's

chances in the Senate, however.

"My suspicion is that a number of senators don't like the idea of an increase in the speed limit," she said.

The bill would have a better chance of passage in the Senate, she said, if Senate Bill 87, the seat belt bill, were made law. SB 87 was defeated in the House on April 22 by a vote of 33-27. The bill was sent back to the House Human Resources Committee for reconsideration.

Some senators, including Sen. Grattan Kerans, D-Eugene, would like to see the two bills tied together in a package. "Statistics seem to indicate that at 65 with seat belts, more lives are saved than at the 55 without," he said.

A mandatory seat belt law and the speed limit increase are two distinct issues, however, according to Miller.

A marriage of the two bills would send the wrong message to Oregon drivers, he said. Such a move may cause people to think the only place one needs to wear seat belts is on the freeway, he said, noting that "95 percent of fatalities don't happen on freeways."

Correction

The Oregon Daily Emerald incorrectly reported on Tuesday that ASUO Project Saferide received 248 responses to its survey last week. The actual number was 448. The Emerald regrets any inconvenience this may have caused.

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