NATIONAL MOTORISTS ASSOCIATION

Empowering Drivers Since 1982

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Testimony for the Senate Transportation Committee On House Bills 4423 through 4427, September 8, 2016

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Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, the National Motorists Association supports the bills as we did in the House, and requests they be reported out favorably. They have some good points.

That said, the original versions were far better and would have produced more safety. Negotiations in the House removed or watered down many provisions that made the original bills better for safety, for smoother traffic flows, and to reduce predatory speed traps operated for ticket revenue. We would like to see a few of these provisions put back in to improve the safety results.

For example, a provision that modified speed limits could not be set lower than the 75th percentile speeds of free flowing traffic was removed. This pleased cities that seek speed trap revenue and the insurance industry that surcharges safe drivers caught in speed traps, but it does NOT improve safety. The attached speed studies in Grand Rapids had only 38 of 1,193 vehicles or 3% of the total in compliance with the arbitrary limits. Laws must force authorities to end these wrongful practices. Even a provision that speed limits could be set no lower than the 50th percentile speed to define no more than half our safe drivers as violators would be helpful to end many predatory speed traps.

Rural freeways could be posted at up to 80 mph to match the current, actual, and safe 85th percentile speeds that are from 78 to 83 mph on most good rural freeways. This was cut back to 75 mph and for only 600 miles of them. This is better than the current 70, but still defines far too many safe drivers as violators.

Rural trunk lines were to be 65 mph, just as before 1974. It is not credible that 65 mph in a 1971 vehicle was OK but 65 is wrong in today's far safer modern cars. The Michigan Department of Transportation paid for a study by Wayne State University by Dr. Gates about the effects of raising speed limits on rural trunk lines to 65. The Abstract talks about travel time savings and fuel consumption differences, totally ignoring the fact that posted limits have almost no effect on actual travel speeds. The 85th percentile speeds on rural trunk lines were 62 to 69 mph in 1995, and they remain the same today. Similar rural highways in Missouri had 85th percentile speeds of 62.5 mph in 1940. In 1940! Suggesting that 65s painted on the signs instead of 55s, with no real changes in travel speeds, is less safe is just not credible. And the extremely high projected costs for the changes to 65 do not make sense. In small areas where the design speed is a bit lower, warning signs and advisory speeds are the cost effective answer.

The Michigan State Police, MDOT and county authorities have corrected speed limits on over 300 highway segments to be at or closer to the ideal 85th percentile levels. NONE have had to be rolled back for poor safety results. Anyone who says we need more data, some test zones first, or restraints to set limits below the 85th percentile speeds has goals other than safety.

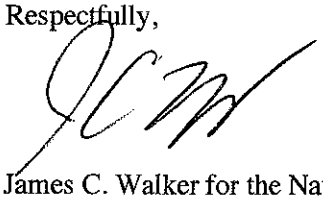
People drive at the speeds they find safe and comfortable, the overwhelming percentage get it right, and setting limits at the 85th percentile speeds tends to maximize safety and concentrate enforcement on the small percentage of drivers who are actually causing safety hazards. Enforcement for revenue is always wrong.

One serious mistake crept into the bills in section 627 (4) about truck speed limits. If the limits are set below 70 mph on an urban freeway, it is not safe to require truck limits to be 10 mph lower. There are some freeways in Wayne County that are badly posted at 55 mph for some wrongful reasons. We do not want those areas posted at 45 mph for trucks to even further disrupt the smooth traffic flows and cause less safety. In areas where freeway limits are below 70, the truck speed limits should be no lower than 55 mph.

The only interaction between most law abiding citizens and the police happens in traffic stops. When safe drivers are stopped and ticketed for "the crime of driving safely for the conditions", respect for traffic laws and the officers that enforce them is seriously damaged. Unnecessary police interactions with citizens due to improperly posted speed limits must stop. The original bills did a far better job in this respect, and putting some of the removed provisions back in would improve the bills significantly.

Thank you and I would welcome any questions.

Respectfully,



James C. Walker for the National Motorists Association

Seven Grand Rapids Speed Studies of Free Flowing Traffic Under Good Conditions

1/29/16 Seward Ave. near 11th, posted limit of 25 mph
85th percentile speed = 38 mph
75th percentile speed = 37 mph
50th percentile speed = 34 mph
Only 4 of 135 vehicles at 25 mph or below, 3% in compliance
132 vehicles or 97% defined as violators by the unrealistically low speed limit

1/29/16 Michigan St. near Houseman, posted limit of 25 mph
85th percentile speed = 37 mph
75th percentile speed = 35 mph
50th percentile speed = 33 mph
Only 2 of 175 vehicles at 25 mph or below, 1% in compliance
173 vehicles or 99% defined as violators by the unrealistically low speed limit

10/22/15 Lake Michigan Drive near Oswego, M-45, posted limit of 35 mph
85th percentile speed = 49 mph
75th percentile speed = 48 mph
50th percentile speed = 44 mph
Only 10 of 222 vehicles at 35 mph or below, 5% in compliance
212 vehicles or 95% defined as violators by the unrealistically low speed limit

10/22/15 Market Ave. at Wealthy, posted limit of 25 mph
85th percentile speed = 38 mph
75th percentile speed = 37 mph
50th percentile speed = 33 mph
Only 4 of 128 vehicles at 25 mph or below, 3% in compliance
124 vehicles or 97% defined as violators by the unrealistically low speed limit

10/6/15 Kalamazoo Ave. near Blossom, posted limit of 35 mph
85th percentile speed = 46 mph
75th percentile speed = 44 mph
50th percentile speed = 42 mph
Only 15 of 301 vehicles at 35 mph or below, 5% in compliance
286 vehicles or 95% defined as violators by the unrealistically low speed limit

9/30/15 Turner Ave. near Edwin, posted limit of 30 mph
85th percentile speed = 44 mph
75th percentile speed = 42 mph
50th percentile speed = 39 mph
Only 3 of 105 vehicles at 30 mph or below, 3% compliance
102 vehicles or 97% defined as violators by the unrealistically low speed limit

5/2/14 Burton St. near Osceola, posted limit of 30 mph
85th percentile speed = 44 mph
75th percentile speed = 42 mph
50th percentile speed = 39 mph
Zero vehicles at 30 mph or below, 0% in compliance
127 vehicles or 100% defined as violators by the unrealistically low speed limit

Totals
1,193 free flowing vehicles were measured.
38 vehicles or 3% were in compliance with the arbitrarily low posted limits.
Should we really define 97% of our fellow drivers as criminals?
This is not an acceptable situation that should be allowed to continue under our state laws.