

Senate Transportation Committee

Kat Bourque 271-3091

HB 154, relative to interference with traffic devices.

Hearing Date: March 7, 2017

Time Opened: 1:20 p.m.

Time Closed: 1:44 p.m.

Members of the Committee Present: Senators Birdsell, Gannon, Ward and McGilvray

Members of the Committee Absent : Senator Watters

Bill Analysis : This bill exempts public transit bus operators from the prohibition on using a device to change, disrupt, or interfere with the operation of a traffic signal.

Sponsors :

Rep. Higgins

Rep. Steven Smith

Rep. Sykes

Rep. MacKenzie

Sen. Feltes

Who supports the bill: Alex Koutronbas (American Council of Engineering), Darryl Perry (Liberty Lobby LLC), Rad Nichols (COAST), Rep. Smith, Rep. Sykes, Rebecca Harris (Transport NH), Van Chestnut (Advance Transit), Nathan Miller (SNHPC), Curtis Barry (NH Transit Association), Rep. Higgins.

Who opposes the bill: No one

Who is neutral on the bill: Bill Lambert (DOT).

Summary of testimony presented in support :

Rep. Higgins

Prime Sponsor

- This bill modifies exemptions from the prohibition on using a device to change, disrupt, or interfere with the operation of a traffic signal.
- The problem this bill is designed to address is traffic jams. They waste time and money for commuters and commercial vehicles, and increase air pollution, waste fuel, and cause annoyance.
- HB 154 would enable digital technology called traffic signal priority (TSP) to be used in New Hampshire.
- The House Transportation Committee amended the bill that distinguishes who may use pre-emption and who may only use prioritization technology.
- HB 154 is enabling legislation that is necessary to use TSP in NH. It is not a mandate. Decisions about signals at intersections will continue to be made by the state or municipality, whoever owns the signal.

- When TSP is used with transit buses, it can contribute to improved intersection flow, easing congestion, increasing convenience, and the like.
- It also helps buses keep on schedule, thereby attracting more riders and taking cars off of the road.
- When transit agencies are publicly funded, the taxpayer benefits as the fuel savings contribute to lower operating costs.

Rep. Smith

- One of the biggest challenges with this bill was explaining the difference in technology between pre-emption and prioritization.
- There is a separate paragraph in the bill that explains that emergency vehicles use pre-emption technology because they are priority. Prioritization consists of a sensor for buses that puts the bus in a queue to automatically speed up the light cycle.
- There would still have to be a pilot program, an engineering study, and the like. This bill simply allows DOT to begin having a conversation about implementing this.
- Rep. Smith used I-89's exit 18 at Dartmouth Hitchcock Medical Center as an example of an area that is frequently backed up and would benefit from this.

Rad Nichols

COAST

- Mr. Nichols submitted written testimony in support of this legislation.
- This bill would give COAST another tool in their toolkit to maintain its efficiency. Investments in this technology do not need to be borne by the state, but rather by the participating public transit system.
- Traveling back and forth across a corridor many times a day, seconds and minutes can add up quickly. Keeping all of its services operating on time is increasingly difficult. This technology would help to provide efficient services.
- TSP is a tool that is regularly employed elsewhere across the country to assist public transit operators in maintain a reliable and cost effective service.

Van Chestnut

Advance Transit

- Mr. Chestnut explained that Burlington and other nearby cities employ TSP technology.
- In the upper valley, there is a group working on the problems at exit 18 on I-89. This group involves many stakeholders working together to try to come up with a range of possible solutions to combat traffic issues.
- Pre-emption technology will always override traffic signal priority.

Nate Miller

Southern New Hampshire Planning Commission (SNHPC)

- In strong support of the legislation.

- More and more communities are looking to eliminate traffic congestion issues within their areas and to expand capacity.
- The state has to effectively manage the demand of the transportation system in the state.
- If people can begin to carpool and use public transportation, the demand is being managed and more traffic can be fit through a corridor without a costly expansion.
- Public transportation providers are struggling to meet their time points, meaning to arrive when they are scheduled to arrive.
- This bill is enabling legislation that would allow the use of TSP to help address the above issues. When public transportation providers are more reliable, people will want to use them. This will ultimately save people time.
- Senator Ward asked if a study has been done to determine how many gallons of gas might be saved in passing this legislation. Mr. Miller explained that there is a preliminary report in the upper valley area. He does not know if they have done out numbers for the amount of fuel to be saved, however, he has heard that preliminary results will save 3 minutes per trip on a fixed route.
- Senator Gannon stated that similar technology is being used in Disney World and asked if it is the same technology. Mr. Miller stated that he was unsure.

Rebecca Harris

Transport New Hampshire

- Ms. Harris submitted written testimony in support of the bill.
- She stressed that this is enabling legislation that is a way for transit systems to become more efficient.
- She echoed the testimony of those who came before her.
- She added that this legislation is for fixed route transit only, not school buses.

Summary of testimony presented in opposition : N/A

Neutral Information Presented:

Bill Lambert

DOT

- The Department favors this enabling legislation so that they have an opportunity to work with transit operators to implement this technology.
- Every driver in this room has the opportunity to extend the green light. They are programmed to stay green for 8-10 seconds minimum with the green light being extended for 2-3 seconds for each car that passes through, until a maximum is hit. This legislation would work similarly for buses and public transit.

Future Action: Pending

KAB
Date Hearing Report completed: March 8, 2017