

BILL ANALYSIS

Senate Research Center
84R7106 JRR-F

S.B. 1919
By: Watson
Transportation
4/16/2015
As Filed

AUTHOR'S / SPONSOR'S STATEMENT OF INTENT

Variable speed limit systems allow for the temporary reduction of speed limits due to congestion, inclement weather, traffic crashes, work zone activities, or other highway incidents. More specifically, variable speed limit systems use sensors to monitor prevailing traffic or weather conditions. These conditions are then used to calculate an appropriate speed limit, which is posted on electronic speed limit signs. In this way, variable speed limit systems can incrementally adjust speed limits to make the most of existing capacity by delaying the point at which traffic flows break down and stop-and-go conditions occur.

H.B. 2204, 83rd Legislature, Regular Session, 2013, instructed the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) to implement a pilot program to study the ability of variable speed limit systems to improve safety during construction, congestion, and inclement weather. The Texas A&M Transportation Institute (TTI) assisted TxDOT in the data collection and analysis for this project, which began in the summer of 2014 with three locations in Temple, San Antonio, and Eastland County. Based on the pilot program results, TTI found that variable speed limits “had a safety benefit at each location.” Furthermore, TTI concluded that variable speed limit systems “would be beneficial if implemented to address inclement weather, congestion or road construction,” and recommended that the state allow such systems moving forward.

In light of TTI’s findings and recommendations, S.B. 1919 gives the Texas Transportation Commission the authority to establish a variable speed limit program.

As proposed, S.B. 1919 amends current law relating to the authority of the Texas Transportation Commission to establish variable speed limits.

RULEMAKING AUTHORITY

This bill does not expressly grant any additional rulemaking authority to a state officer, institution, or agency.

SECTION BY SECTION ANALYSIS

SECTION 1. Amends Section 545.353, Transportation Code, by adding Subsection (i), as follows:

(i) Authorizes the Texas Transportation Commission, by order recorded in its minutes, to establish a variable speed limit program to allow the temporary lowering of a prima facie speed limit to address inclement weather, congestion, road construction, or any other condition that affects the safe and orderly movement of traffic on a roadway. Authorizes notice of a speed limit established under the program to be displayed using a stationary or portable changeable message sign, as defined by Section 544.013 (Changeable Message Sign System). Provides that a speed limit that is established under the program:

(1) must be based on an engineering and traffic investigation;

(2) may be effective for all or a designated portion of the highway and for any period of the day or night, as the Texas Department of Transportation determines necessary; and

(3) is effective only when the speed limit is posted and only if a sign notifying motorists of the change in speed limit is posted at least 500 feet but not more than 1,000 feet before the point at which the speed limit begins.

SECTION 2. Effective date: September 1, 2015.