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Legislative
Analysis
Section**

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TRUCK LENGTH AMENDMENTS

House Bill 5161 (Substitute H-1)
First Analysis (3-26-90)

Sponsor: Rep. Bart Stupak
Committee: Transportation

THE APPARENT PROBLEM:

** With the passage of the Federal Land Transportation Act in 1982 the federal government specified that states could not impose overall lengths for truck tractor-trailer or -semitrailer combinations traveling on federal highways. Federal rules also specify that states cannot prohibit the use of trailer or semitrailers like those that were in actual and lawful use in the states on December 1, 1982. On October 11, 1989 Michigan was notified that it was not in compliance with federal statutes in two areas: Michigan is imposing a 65-foot overall length on combinations of vehicles that were in actual and lawful use on December 1, 1982 and other combinations in which a trailer in the combination exceeds 28-1/2 feet. When the federal government passed the Land Transportation Act, Michigan had no specific length limits for semitrailers and trailers used in combination. Michigan imposed the 65-foot overall length limit in 1984. It has been established that in 1982, 65-foot truck tractor, semitrailer and trailer combinations with 7-foot truck tractors could have operated legally on Michigan highways. Since there is no prohibition for states measuring the overall length of trailers in combinations of vehicles, an overall length limit of 58 feet for trailers in combination could be implemented to ensure that all trailer combinations in operation in 1982 were "grandparented" and any built like them will be allowed to be put into use. Allowing 58-foot combinations of tractor-trailers to be operated on the federal highways with no total combination length restriction would put Michigan in compliance with the federal statutes.

** Truck-trailer and -semitrailer combination length limits were 65 feet in 1982, and many felt that this length was appropriate since these combinations were primarily used to haul forest goods and were fairly unique to Michigan. Under the 1982 amendments, these combinations were limited to 59 feet. During 1988 the code was amended to restore the allowable length of these vehicles to the original limit of 65 feet. However, because of technological advances in the truck cab industry and the development of longer cabs, many truckers would like to purchase trucks with cabs that are longer than those used in a 65-foot combinations because they may be safer than those with short cabs. Since the federal government does not regulate truck, trailer or semitrailer combinations, it is felt that the state should address this issue.

** The statute's grandparent clause prohibits owners of trailers in actual and lawful use in Michigan on December 1, 1982 from purchasing new tractors and still enjoying the grandparented length allowance. The 1982 language also prohibits new trailers like those in use on December 1, 1982 from being put into use. Owners of trailers are required to continue to purchase truck tractors with short cabs to stay within overall measurement requirements of the Motor Vehicle Code. Many truckers would like to purchase truck tractors with cabs that are longer than those used in the 65-foot combination believing them to be safer than those with short cabs.

** Under federal law, stinger-steered vehicles (vehicles used to carry motor vehicles, recreational vehicles, or boats) are considered special vehicles subject to special regulations. Federal rules specify that the states cannot impose an overall limit of less than 75 feet on stinger-steered automobile and boat transporters exclusive of front and rear overhang. Adoption of a 75-foot length limit would put Michigan in compliance with federal law.

** Finally, the federal Land Transportation Act was amended recently to add language that specified procedures to ensure uniformity in the way trucks are measured. Currently, not all states measure trucks in the same way, and Michigan statutes do not contain procedures for measuring trailers. It has been suggested that all states adopt the federal language so that methods of measurement will be consistent.

THE CONTENT OF THE BILL:

The bill would amend the Michigan Vehicle Code to provide an additional exception to the state's overall length limit of 59 feet by providing that there would be no overall limit on a truck tractor, trailer, or semitrailer combination if the overall length of the semitrailer and trailer or two semitrailers as measured from the front of the first towed unit to the rear of the second towed unit while the units were coupled together did not exceed an overall length of 58 feet, including load. The bill would also delete an obsolete grandparent clause regarding 1982 trailers and semitrailers and would specify that semitrailers and trailers would be measured in certain places to provide uniformity in the measuring of semitrailers and trailers. The bill would establish a total length limit of 75 feet for stinger-steered combinations of truck tractors and semitrailers and would define the term "stinger-steered," and the bill would increase from 65 to 70 feet the overall length limit for truck and semitrailer or trailer combinations used to transport saw logs, pulpwood, and tree length poles.

MCL 257.719

FISCAL IMPLICATIONS:

According to the Department of State Police, the bill would have no fiscal implications for the state. (3-21-90)

ARGUMENTS:

For:

Michigan currently receives in excess of \$300 million of federal highway fund money. The Federal Highway Administration has stated that five percent of the \$300 million would be withheld during the first year of penalization, and the percentage withheld would increase each year, if the state does not comply with federal rules and regulations. The state cannot afford to lose any amount of federal help, and the bill will ensure that it will continue to receive the maximum amount of federal money for which it is eligible by adopting the relatively technical

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amendments needed to comply with federal law. In addition, the bill will resolve problems faced by Michigan's timber industry by allowing truckers to drive trucks with cabs that are longer, and many feel potentially safer, than those used in 65-foot combinations by extending truck length limits.

POSITIONS:

The Michigan Association of Timbermen supports the bill. (3-21-90)

The Department of State Police supports the bill. (3-21-90)

The Michigan Trucking Association supports the bill. (3-21-90)

The Department of State has no position on the bill. (3-21-90)

The Department of Transportation has no position on the bill. (3-21-90)