

Transportation Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: HB-5204

AN ACT CONCERNING THE REGISTRATION AND USE OF LOW-SPEED

Title: VEHICLES.

Vote Date: 3/20/2024

Vote Action: Joint Favorable Substitute

PH Date: 2/26/2024

File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Transportation Committee

REASONS FOR BILL:

Vehicles that fall under the definition of low-speed vehicles (LSV's) are currently not legally permitted on Connecticut roads. There is currently no mention in statute of LSV's, but because the Department of Motor Vehicles do not register LSV's and state law prohibits driving unregistered motor vehicles on public roads, LSV's are not authorized to be driven on public roads. Because of this, the bill would allow for the registration of low-speed vehicles and permitting LSVs to be operated on roads with a maximum speed limit of thirty-five miles per hour.

SUBSTITUTE LANGUAGE

Substitute language limits application to roads with twenty-five miles per hour limit unless town or the Office of the State Traffic Administration otherwise prohibit or limit operation on roads within their jurisdiction.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

Garrett Eucalitto, Commissioner, Connecticut Department of Transportation (CT DOT)

The Commissioner of the CT Department of Transportation (CT DOT), Garrett Eucalitto, opposes the bill. As CT DOT prioritizes road safety over all else, they have concerns over studies showing safety issues when low-speed vehicles (LSV's) and other motor vehicles share highways and roads. LSV's operate at a maximum speed of twenty-five miles per hour and the gap between that and speed limit LSVs would be able to be operated on (thirty-five miles per hour) represents a serious safety concern. Furthermore, CT DOT has concerns

with the bill only requiring that LSV's meet federal safety requirements, as the requirements for there to be at minimum only headlights, turn signals, and a windshield is not safe enough for operation on roads with other motor vehicles.

CT DOT recommended the committee to limit LSV's to roads and highways with a twenty-five mile per hour speed limit as that is the maximum speed LSV's can reach and recommends that the use of LSV's on any state highway to be approved by the Office of the State Traffic Administration.

Tony Guerrero, Commissioner, Department of Motor Vehicles (CT DMV)

The Connecticut Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) opposes the bill. The DMV raised concerns with the dangers to operators of low-speed vehicles and to other motorists, as low-speed vehicles do not offer enough protection to users in the event of a crash on a roadway. The DMV also raised administrative concerns over unpreparedness for such changes, as registering and titling low-speed vehicles would pose as a workload burned for employees and system design modifications that are not currently budgeted would be required.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Tim Ackert, State Representative of the 8th District, CT General Assembly

Rep. Ackert testified that our neighboring states allow for low-speed vehicles on their roads and that we are just one of two states that don't allow low-speed vehicles on our roads. He testified about the economic incentives there were, such as registration fees, sales tax revenue, property tax revenue, and revenue for business who sell and repair low-speed vehicles. Furthermore, Rep. Ackert states that these vehicles are both cheaper for consumers and more environmentally friendly compared with full-sized vehicles.

Thomas Pipoli, Owner, Saybrook Leasing and Rental

Mr. Pipoli owns and operates a fuller service golf cart dealer in Old Saybrook. He testifies that beach communities in Old Saybrook and other shoreline towns is ubiquitous and allowing for residents and tourists to use LSVs to travel into town outside their communities will improve local economies across the coastline. He also states that there will be more revenue for the state, less pollution, and points to Massachusetts and Rhode Island seeing success with this initiative.

Gary Bergeron, President, Connecticut Trailers and Powersports

Mr. Bergeron testified that allowing for LSV usage would have a positive environmental impact, as these vehicles are electric/low emission and allowing for LSV usage on roads would promote sustainable transportation, while also potentially spurring charging infrastructure development. He advocates for the economic benefits of this bill, as it would provide registration and sales tax revenue in addition to opportunities for businesses involved with the manufacturing, sales, and maintenance of low-speed vehicles. Finally, Mr. Bergeron

believes it will enhance the experiences of tourists and residents by providing a new way to explore.

Terri Foster, Student, Ledyard High School

Ms. Foster testified that she faces challenges walking her dogs on busy roads and believes allowing low-speed vehicles to travel on the roads would make roads safer for pedestrians. She supports the regulations of LSVs so they will not be a danger to pedestrians and cyclists.

Barry Kresch, President, Electric Vehicle Club of Connecticut

Mr. Kresch supports this bill as it would reduce pollution, reduce congestion, and support transit-oriented development, but would also like to see this bill only authorize electric LSVs to move towards meeting emissions reduction targets.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

Susan Pronovost, Executive Director, Connecticut Greenhouse Growers Association

Ms. Pronovost opposes the language in the bill allowing for low-speed vehicle usage only on highways with a speed limit at or below thirty-five miles per hour, as many family farms have fields on both sides of roadways with speed limits above the thirty-five miles per hour threshold. She raises concerns over farmers being unable to bring equipment to service their fields. She also raises concerns over the definition of agricultural tractor in section 2 and concerns of gator and tug usage by greenhouse growers facing enforcement by local authorities.

R. Bruce Donald, Southern New England Manager, East Coast Greenway Alliance

Mr. Donald opposes the language in the bill that appears to classify all e-bikes as low-speed vehicles. He points to the federal definition of low-speed vehicles not specifically mentioning e-bikes. As they are a lightweight, ADA mobility device, he believes it is unfair to require registrations, license plates, licensing, and insurance for e-bikes. He does not want e-bikes to be included in this bill as a result.

Reported by: Adithya Saranathan

Date: 4/1/24