

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2008 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE

House Bill 983 (Delegate Malone)
Environmental Matters

Vehicle Laws - Operation of Low Speed Vehicles - Highway Restrictions

This bill alters the maximum speed limit for highways on which low speed vehicles (LSVs) may be driven from 30 to 35 miles per hour. If the posted maximum speed limit on a highway exceeds 35 miles per hour, then a person is prohibited from driving an LSV on that highway.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: The bill's changes could be implemented with existing resources.

Local Effect: The bill's changes could be implemented with existing resources.

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Current Law: An LSV is a four-wheeled electric vehicle with a maximum speed capability that exceeds 20 miles per hour but is less than 25 miles per hour. A person is prohibited from driving an LSV on a highway where the posted maximum speed limit exceeds 30 miles per hour. A person cannot drive an LSV on an expressway or other controlled access highway with appropriate signage, or on a highway where LSVs are prohibited by county or municipal ordinance. LSVs may not be driven across a highway where the posted maximum speed exceeds 45 miles per hour, except at an intersection controlled by a traffic control signal or with a stop sign at each approach to the intersection.

Background: LSVs are sometimes called neighborhood electric vehicles or global electric motorcars. Elsewhere in the country, LSVs are usually restricted to roads with maximum speeds of 35 miles per hour. They are generally regarded as appropriate for communities that accommodate slow speed traffic. Some golf club and retirement communities are designed to encourage the use of LSVs.

In 1998, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration issued a final rule on safety standards for LSVs. NHTSA noted the growing public interest in using golf carts and other similar vehicles for short shopping trips and other recreational purposes, primarily within retirement or other planned communities. LSVs have gained popularity because they are zero-emission vehicles, relatively quiet, low-cost, and energy efficient. Traditional golf carts usually have a top speed of 15 miles per hour. LSVs have been defined in many states, including Maryland, as achieving a top speed of 25 miles per hour.

In the face of some deaths and serious injuries, NHTSA safety standards now require, among other safety features, headlamps, turn signals, parking brakes, rearview mirrors, windshields, seat belts, and vehicle identification numbers.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: An identical bill, HB 1307 of 2007, received an unfavorable report from the House Environmental Matters Committee.

Cross File: None.

Information Source(s): Maryland Department of Transportation, Department of Legislative Services

Fiscal Note History: First Reader - February 29, 2008
mam/ljm

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