

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2009 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE

House Bill 371 (Charles County Delegation)
Environmental Matters

Motor Vehicles - Low Speed Vehicle - Definition

This bill changes the definition of a low speed vehicle (LSV) to include non-electric vehicles.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: Transportation Trust Fund and general fund revenues may increase minimally beginning in FY 2010 to the extent that the definitional change results in a slight increase in the number of vehicle registrations and any additional violations of the Maryland Vehicle Law. Enforcement can be handled with existing resources.

Local Effect: Enforcement can be handled with existing resources.

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Current Law: A LSV is a four-wheeled electric vehicle with a maximum speed capability of between 20 and 25 miles per hour. A person may not drive an LSV (1) on a highway where the posted maximum speed limit exceeds 30 miles per hour; (2) on any expressway or other controlled access highway with a sign prohibiting LSVs; (3) on a highway where LSVs are prohibited by county or municipal ordinance; or (4) 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. The Motor Vehicle Administration has adopted by regulation registration requirements and safety standards for LSVs.

Background: LSVs are sometimes called neighborhood electric vehicles. They are generally regarded as appropriate for communities that accommodate slow speed traffic. In fact, some golf club and retirement communities are designed to encourage the use of LSVs. However, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures, as of November 2008, only 26 states allow the use of LSVs on roads or authorize local governments to allow their use. Generally LSVs are restricted to roads with maximum speeds of 35 miles per hour or less, a restriction that accords with the American Association of Motor Vehicle Administrators' Model Rule on LSVs released in May 2008.

In 1998, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) 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.

In fiscal 2007 and 2008, there were only seven violations of the Maryland Vehicle Law related to LSVs, with less than 50 such vehicles registered in Maryland.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: None.

Cross File: None.

Information Source(s): Judiciary (Administrative Office of the Courts), Maryland Department of Transportation, National Conference of State Legislatures, Department of Legislative Services

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Analysis by: Evan M. Isaacson

Direct Inquiries to:
(410) 946-5510
(301) 970-5510

