

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2014 Session

FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE
Revised

Senate Bill 72

(Chair, Judicial Proceedings Committee)(By Request -
Departmental - Transportation)

Judicial Proceedings

Environmental Matters

Motor Vehicles - Weight and Axle Load Limits

This departmental bill conforms specified provisions of the Maryland Vehicle Law to federal regulations governing vehicle weight and axle weight limits. Specifically, when determining the overall gross weight of vehicles, the bill exempts over-the-road buses and intrastate public agency passenger buses from tandem axle weight limits, while maintaining overall weight limits applicable to vehicles and vehicle combinations required under a federal statutory formula. The bill also increases the weight limit tolerance, from 400 to 550 pounds, for vehicles that use an auxiliary power unit or idle-reduction technology unit to reduce fuel consumption and emissions.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: Federal fund revenues are fully maintained in FY 2015 and 2016 as the State Highway Administration continues to qualify for existing federal transportation grants, a portion of which it may no longer qualify for in the absence of the bill. While the exact amount of federal grant funds to be received in FY 2015 and future years cannot be reliably estimated, it may be similar to the approximately \$478.8 million expected to be received from the 2014 federal transportation grant. However, beginning in FY 2017, federal grant funds may be jeopardized as the bill does not conform to federal transportation law regarding motor home axle weights. Any reduction in the number of vehicle weight penalties imposed due to the additional exemptions is assumed to be negligible.

Local Effect: Local government revenues are fully maintained in FY 2015 and 2016. While the exact amount in federal funds to be received and distributed to local governments in FY 2015 and future years cannot be reliably estimated, it may be similar to the approximately \$59.3 million expected to be distributed to local governments from

the 2014 federal grant. Beginning in FY 2017, grant revenues may be jeopardized, as discussed above.

Small Business Effect: The Maryland Department of Transportation (MDOT) has determined that this bill has minimal or no impact on small business (attached). The Department of Legislative Services concurs with this assessment. (The attached assessment does not reflect amendments to the bill.)

Analysis

Current Law/Background: Chapter 100 of 2011 made several changes to the vehicle weight and axle weight limits in the Maryland Vehicle Law to conform to federal law. These changes included providing an exemption for large interstate buses and intrastate public transit buses from the generally applicable single-axle weight limits and establishing a weight limit tolerance of 400 pounds to account for the additional weight of an auxiliary power unit or an idle-reduction technology unit.

In 2012, the U.S. Congress passed the Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act (“MAP-21”), which made several changes to federal highway law. These changes included (1) increasing the weight tolerance, from 400 to 550 pounds, for auxiliary power units, thereby further promoting the use of the fuel-saving devices; (2) making permanent the temporary exemption from single-axle weight limits available for over-the-road buses and specified intrastate transit vehicles (codified in the Maryland Vehicle Law by Chapter 100 of 2011); and (3) *expanding this axle weight limit exemption to include motor homes.*

Under federal transportation law, commonly known as the “federal bridge formula,” vehicle weight limits are determined by the number of axles and the length of the vehicle. Federal law also permits states to enforce a single-axle weight limit of no less than 24,000 pounds. MDOT advises that the bill partially conforms State law to the recently amended federal laws. Thus, the bill preserves federal transportation aid funding, in fiscal 2015 and 2016 while maintaining the ability of the State to enforce the 24,000 single-axle weight limit. According to MDOT, federal fund revenues may be jeopardized beginning in fiscal 2017 without future legislative action to conform State law to federal weight limits for motor homes.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: None.

Cross File: None.

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

Fiscal Note History: First Reader - January 14, 2014
ncs/ljm Revised - Senate Third Reader - March 13, 2014

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ANALYSIS OF ECONOMIC IMPACT ON SMALL BUSINESSES

TITLE OF BILL: Motor Vehicles – Weight and Axle Load Limits

BILL NUMBER: SB 72

PREPARED BY: Department of Transportation

PART A. ECONOMIC IMPACT RATING

This agency estimates that the proposed bill:

WILL HAVE MINIMAL OR NO ECONOMIC IMPACT ON MARYLAND SMALL
BUSINESS

OR

WILL HAVE MEANINGFUL ECONOMIC IMPACT ON MARYLAND SMALL
BUSINESSES

PART B. ECONOMIC IMPACT ANALYSIS