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Whitmer Signs Speed Limit Legislation, Grand Rapids Bill, Historic Vehicle Bill

Gov. Gretchen WHITMER has signed three bills into law, including legislation affecting how speed limits can be determined, a bill to help grow Grand Rapids and a bill to let vintage cars drive on the roads longer.

First, HB 4012 was sponsored by Rep. Bradley SLAGH (R-Zeeland), who said the bill was in response to frustrations by community governments with the method that is used to determine local speed limits.

“I am happy this commonsense bill is now law. This will help to correct less-than-perfect language in our current law related to how speed limits are set, provide ways to reduce costs for our local road agencies and institute clear guidelines to help keep all roadway users safer,” Slagh said.

He said the current law forced local governments to round up to the nearest multiple of 5 mph, but the new law lets them round down. It also lets local municipalities conduct engineering and safety studies to set speed limits.

One of those vehicles driving on the road could end up being a vintage vehicle, which Rep. John ROTH (R-Interlochen)’s HB 4183 would allow to be driven on Michigan roads with a historic license plate for three months, instead of one.

“Many cars and trucks with historic plates were built here in Michigan. People put a lot of time and money into purchasing and maintaining these automobiles. Anyone with that much commitment to historic vehicles should have all summer to show them off,” Roth said.

Whitmer also signed HB 5048 , sponsored by Rep. John FITZGERALD (D-Wyoming), that would authorize local governments in Kent County to increase the amount of taxes raised by hotels and motels to be able to build an amphitheater and soccer stadium.

The tax increase would require a local vote to pass, but area leaders were excited by the prospect of having the vote.

“This is a significant milestone – a win for our communities, residents and our goal of making Kent County a leading destination for travel, entertainment and business in the Midwest,” Fitzgerald said.

Whitmer said Grand Rapids was one of the fastest -growing communities in the state, and a soccer stadium and amphitheater would help revitalize the area.

“Today’s bipartisan legislation will ensure Kent County and the city of Grand Rapids can continue to grow and thrive,” she said.

County Road Assoc Wants Mileage Fee Pilot Program

Discussion at the County Road Association of Michigan (CRA) 2024 Highway Conference this March included the potential benefits of a mileage-based user fee (MBUG) to replace the state’s gas tax, and the CRA is now urging the state to launch a pilot program to gauge the potential for MBUGs.

Dr. Patricia HENDREN, executive director of the 18-state Eastern Transportation Coalition, said a greater reliance on MBUGs could restore the link between miles driven and drivers’ contributions to the road network.

At the Lansing conference, which included 250 county road agency representatives, Hendren said that fuel-efficiency

advancements over the last 25 years have reduced the gas purchased per mile driven, resulting in less gas tax collected.

In Michigan, the gas tax and license plate fees are the two top contributors to road funding, something CRA Chief Executive Officer Denise DONOHUE argues could soon result in insufficient funding to keep up with Michigan’s crumbling road and bridge network.

According to the CRA, Michigan’s revenue collected from the gas tax reached a high point in 2001 and has been in decline since.

In 1994, motorists in the U.S. were paying about .94 cents per mile driven in federal gas tax, but in 2019 that number had dropped to .81 cents per mile driven, Hendren said. At the same time, the purchasing power of the 1993 federal gas tax dollar has dropped by 45 percent, rather than increasing with inflation.

Donohue said the “burden of funding roads is falling increasingly on people who own older cars and less-efficient vehicles, such as trucks and SUVs, because the gas tax is based on a vehicle’s fuel efficiency rather than on the driver’s use of the road system.”

Hendren added that the growing popularity of electric vehicles has also contributed to the ineffectiveness of the traditional gas tax.

With fuel tax funding likely only to diminish further as more EV’s hit the roads and gas vehicles become more fuel efficient, Hendren said Michigan needs a “new and more sustainable way to fund road improvements, and MBUF could be part of that solution.

“Our vehicles have changed dramatically over the last 100 years and our funding mechanisms need to change as well,” she said.

A CRA study done in late February found that Michigan must allocate an additional \$2.4 billion in annual funding to

restore county road and bridge networks to modest goals, with the funding gap growing 28 percent in two years.

CRA Chief Deputy and Legislative Director Ed NOYOLA called on the Legislature to enact a fuel tax increase in the meantime, but he added that “going forward, we need an MBUF-like replacement for state fuel tax, which would apply whether a vehicle is powered by gas, electricity, hybrid sources or another alternative fuel.”

To get going, CRA officials suggested an MBUF pilot program where voluntary participants could choose how they wanted to report their mileage. They could then receive reports showing how much they would have paid in gas tax vs. MBUF for their travel in a certain month or quarterly.

Other options for mileage tracking outside self-reporting include in-vehicle telematics, phone apps or vehicle diagnostic devices to download mileage only, with or without GPS. Some states with MBUF programs offer drivers the option of a flat fee based on average annual miles driven in lieu of reporting mileage.

Hendren said if Michigan is to consider something similar, a pilot must address public education, privacy concerns, administrative costs and the effect on residents in different areas of the state.

Though privacy could be cited as a concern in cases where mileage must be reported, Hendren said pilot participants in other states consistently expressed reduced concerns about privacy after experiencing MBUF firsthand.

She added that while people in rural areas are often less receptive to MBUF because they travel more miles, drivers in rural areas on average would still pay less than they do now because they tend to drive older, larger and less fuel-efficient vehicles.

Three states have already implemented a voluntary MBUF program - Oregon, Utah and Virginia - while Hawaii has adopted a mandatory MBUF.

Whitmer Asks FEMA, Congress For More Warm-Winter Relief

Gov. Gretchen WHITMER sent a letter to Congress, the Federal Emergency Management Agency and the Small Business Administration asking for more ways to help winter businesses impacted by the lack of snow.

The letter cites the cancelation of three dog sled races in the Upper Peninsula, the 16 percent coverage of ice on the Great Lakes this winter and the record high February temperatures that have cost millions from snow sports in the state.

“I appreciate the federal government working with us to deliver financial relief to businesses in 43 counties around the state. However, this solution left out many counties that

truly need assistance, which is why I’m asking the federal government to create new paths of federal relief for all impacted,” Whitmer said.

MIRS QUOTE OF THE WEEK

“People put a lot of time and money into purchasing and maintaining these automobiles. Anyone with that much commitment to historic vehicles should have all summer to show them off.”

- Rep. John ROTH, whose bill extending the timeframe for historic vehicles to be driven in Michigan from one to three months was signed by Gov. Gretchen WHITMER this week.

Whitmer said in March there was an ongoing drought across the state of Michigan, which allowed for the 43 counties to apply for federal aid from the Small Business Administration.

The Small Business Administration Economic Injury Disaster Loans could be for up to \$2 million to help with operating expenses and obligations. The businesses would pay no interest on the loan for the first year and 4 percent for the rest of the loan. The Michigan Small Business Development Center could also assist with the loan application. Most

businesses in affected counties would have until Sept. 26 to apply, except Dickinson, which has until Nov. 27.

Whitmer also announced that Houghton County would have until Dec. 26, but those would only cover business impacts that happened from Feb. 20 and after.

“Michiganders are used to tough winters, but this year’s record-setting warm winter has been tough in a different way, causing economic hardships for small businesses and regional economies that rely on snow,” Whitmer said.

[Hertel Raises \\$1.3 Million In First Quarter](#)

Former Sen. Curtis HERTEL raised over \$1.3 million with \$2 million cash on hand at the first Federal Election Commission (FEC) deadline of 2024 in his campaign for Michigan’s 7th Congressional District.

The reports aren’t due until April 15, but the quarterly cutoff date for the reported funding was March 31.

“I’m incredibly grateful for all of the contributions towards my campaign by such hard-working and dedicated supporters,” Hertel said in a statement. “This will be one of the toughest races in the entire country, and I am proud of the grassroots coalition we are building here in Mid-Michigan.”

Last month, Hertel filed his petition signatures to appear on the August primary ballot.

He has no primary opponents currently, with fewer than 20 days until the filing deadline (See “Hertel Files 3,000 Signatures; Beeler Passing On 3rd House Term”, 3/19/24).

Former Rep. Tom BARRETT, his Republican opponent, also was not facing internal opposition.

The seat is held by U.S. Rep. Elissa SLOTKIN (D-Holly), who is running for the U.S. Senate seat held by Debbie STABENOW (D-Lansing).

[Supreme Court Goes On the Road](#)

The Michigan Supreme Court will hear oral arguments at Southwestern Michigan College in Dowagiac on April 24.

Arguments in *People v. Evan Andrew Oslund* were scheduled to begin at 10 a.m. This is the 29th time the court has traveled to another location to hear a case.

The Pokagon Band of Potawatomi Indians will lead a community activity with a drum ceremony, and case briefing and debriefing sessions will be led by Supreme Court Chief Commissioner Daniel C. BRUBAKER.

Justices and staff travel to communities statewide as part of the “Court Community Connections” program, which started as a public education program aimed at high school students.

THIS WEEK IN MICHIGAN HISTORY

On April 6, 1971, the Detroit Tigers had their largest opening-day attendance. The Tigers beat Cleveland 8-2 before the largest opening-day crowd, 54,089, in the team’s history.