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STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 25TH ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

Senate Committee on Transportation,
Public Safety, and Veterans and Military Affairs
Assembly Bill 389 Testimony
October 31, 2013

First of all, I would like to thank you, Chairman Petrowski and committee members, for allowing me to testify on AB 389. This bill increases the maximum speed limit from 65 mph to 70 mph on certain roadways.

Speed limits were often 70 mph on rural highways until the federal government set a maximum speed limit of 55 mph in 1973, largely to conserve fuel during the energy crisis. States that did not decrease their speed limit to 55 mph would lose federal tax dollars.

In 1995, federal regulations were abolished and states returned to setting their own limits. Many states immediately raised limits back to 70 mph or higher.

It's About Safety

Safety is important to all of us. This bill will not compromise the safety of the people of Wisconsin, or I would not be sitting here today. However, sometimes people assume an increase in the speed limit will automatically lead to an increase in fatalities. That assumption is not necessarily true.

When Indiana raised its speed limits on rural interstates and selected multilane highways on July 1, 2005, some people expected injuries and severity of injuries to increase. However, according to a study by Purdue University, the increased speed limit did not affect the probability of suffering a severe injury in an accident.¹

Further, a June 2013 article by the non-partisan Council of State Governments notes the following: "Increasing the speed limits on some roads may not necessarily increase the frequency of accidents. Some research indicates that increases in the speed limit can actually decrease or maintain the rate of accidents."²

The proposed bill to increase the speed limit in Wisconsin also has some important safeguards.

First, the bill pertains only to interstates, freeways and expressways. We are not proposing to raise the speed limit on all highways in Wisconsin.

Second, the bill allows the DOT time to conduct engineering and safety studies to identify segments where the limit should remain at 65 mph. These provisions will assure that the speed limit increase takes place in a safe and measured manner only where appropriate.

It's About Time

When I talk to people about raising the limit, many of them say, "It's about time." They have driven safely at 70 mph in other states and like the option of driving a few miles per hour faster on our roads too.

Nearly 5% of Wisconsin commuters have a one-way commute of 60 minutes or more. This bill will enable them to get home faster so they can spend more time with their families and less time on the road.

It's about Business and Tourism

Raising the speed limit is also good for business and good for tourism. People often determine their vacation plans based on how long it will take to get to a destination and return home. Longer travel times make spots less attractive to some travelers.

By increasing the speed limit, perhaps out-of-state visitors will be able to spend a few more minutes and a few more dollars at destinations like the beautiful Wisconsin Maritime Museum, located right in my hometown of Manitowoc.

In August, Illinois Governor Pat Quinn signed a bill into law allowing for 70 mph speed limits on some rural highways. As a result, Wisconsin is now the only state in the Midwest with a 65 mph maximum speed limit for all roadways (see attached map). AB 389 will align Wisconsin's speed limit with the speed limit in neighboring states.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I am excited to work with my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to make a 70 MPH speed limit in Wisconsin a reality. I would be happy to take any questions.

¹Nataliya V. Malyshkina, "Higher Interstate Speed Limit Proves Safe for Indiana," Purdue University, June 28, 2008 <<https://news.ups.purdue.edu/x/2008a/080623MannerSpeed.html>>.

²Kendrick Vonderschmitt, "States Raise Speed Limits while Safety Debate Continues," Council of State Governments, June 21, 2013 <<http://knowledgecenter.csg.org/drupal/content/states-raise-speed-limits-while-safety-debate-continues>>.

Myths about Speed Limits

Adapted from information from the National Motorists Association
<http://www.motorists.org/speed-limits/faq>

Myth - If the speed limit were raised everyone would drive faster.

Regardless of the speed limit, the majority of drivers will not go faster than the speed they feel is comfortable and safe.

Myth – Higher speed limits cause more accidents and traffic fatalities.

If a speed limit is raised to actually reflect real travel speeds, the higher limit will make the roads safer.

Myth - Slower is always safer.

Federal and state studies have consistently shown that the drivers most likely to get into accidents are those traveling significantly below the average speed.

(http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Solomon_Curve)

Myth – If people are speeding, we should ticket the speeders rather than raise the speed limit.

Studies have shown that the 85th percentile is the safest possible level at which to set a speed limit.

Myth – Higher speed limits are not realistic.

According to a pamphlet produced by the Washington State Department of Transportation, realistic speed limits should invite public compliance by conforming to the behavior of most drivers.

Myth - Most traffic accidents are caused by speeding.

Research conducted by the Florida Department of Transportation showed that the percentage of accidents actually caused by speeding is very low - 2.2 percent.

Myth - Our roads are more dangerous than ever before.

The nation's fatality rate (deaths per 100 million vehicle miles traveled) has dropped from 1.73 in 1995 to 1.16 in 2012. (<http://alerts.motorists.org/nma-email-newsletter-issue-28/#sthash.Rg3ygbMA.dpuf> and <http://www-nrd.nhtsa.dot.gov/Pubs/811741.pdf>)

Myth- If nobody follows a speed limit, it doesn't matter if it is underposted.

According to a speed-limit brochure published in conjunction with the Michigan State Patrol, inappropriately established speed limits cause drivers to take all traffic signals less seriously.

Myth – Lower speed limits save gas.

Research has shown that the 55-mph National Maximum Speed Limit, which was enacted specifically to save gas, had practically no impact on fuel consumption.

Adapted from information from the National Motorists Association
<http://www.motorists.org/speed-limits/faq>

Wisconsin Freeway Speed Limit Analysis & Modification Concepts

September 1, 2011

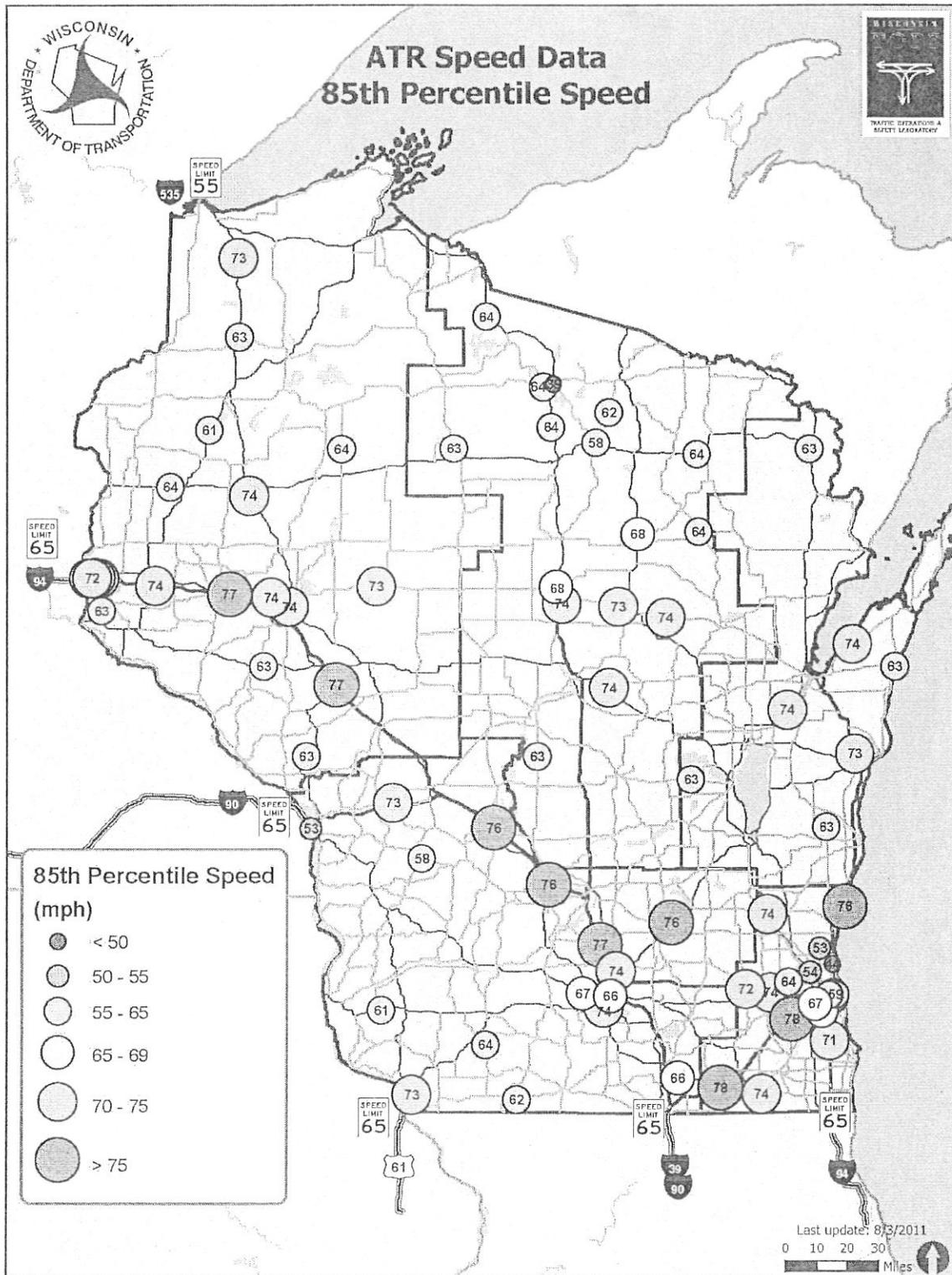


Figure 1 Average 2010 85th Percentile Speed from 81 Automatic Traffic Recorders



Wisconsin Motor Carriers Association

Good stuff.



"Promoting Safe and Reliable Truck Transportation"

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October 31, 2013

To: Members,
Senate Transportation Committee

Subject: Assembly Bill 389

The Wisconsin Motor Carriers Association (WMCA) currently has 1,050 member companies who operate commercial motor vehicles in this state. I would like to offer the following comments on AB 389:

1. Highway safety is a top priority for our members. The tragedy of traffic fatalities hits home for everyone in trucking because the highways are our workplace. Because of this commitment to highway safety the association sponsors numerous safety programs, promoting highway safety and honoring safe companies and drivers.
2. The trucking industry in Wisconsin is proud of our excellent safety record. Despite a significant increase in the number of large trucks and vehicle miles over the last ten years, the number of large trucks involved in fatalities dropped by 41.7% during this same period.
3. A number of trucking companies have limiters on their engines that restrict the speed of their trucks from 62 to 65 miles per hour. I believe most of these companies will continue to restrict their vehicles even if the speed limit in Wisconsin is raised to 70 miles per hour.
4. Because of this dedication to highway safety, many of our members do not understand the need to raise the speed limit to 70 miles per hour. They worry that doing that could potentially have an adverse effect on highway safety.
5. If the legislature decides to raise the speed limit to 70 miles per hour on rural Interstates, the WMCA is comfortable with the approach taken in the Assembly, letting the DOT evaluate which highways are appropriate for the higher speed and analyzing the safety aspects of a split speed limit.

Sincerely,

Thomas A. Howells, President



NATIONAL MOTORISTS ASSOCIATION

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Oral Testimony in Support of Assembly Bill 389
Wisconsin Senate Committee on Transportation, Public Safety, and Veterans and Military Affairs
Submitted by the National Motorists Association, October 31, 2013

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, my name is John Bowman, and I represent the National Motorists Association. The NMA, headquartered here in Dane County consists of thousands of members across the country and was founded over 30 years ago on the principle that speed limits must be set properly to ensure safe, efficient traffic flow. That is why I am speaking in support of the passage of Assembly Bill 389.

Understanding driver behavior is critical to setting safe speed limits. Research from the Federal Highway Administration shows that drivers tend to travel at a speed that they feel is safe and reasonable regardless of the posted speed. In most cases, this turns out to actually be the safest speed at which to travel and forms the engineering basis for properly set limits.

Increasing the speed limit from 65 mph to 70 mph on selected freeways and expressways will not compel people to drive 85 to 90 mph because most drivers simply don't feel safe traveling at those speeds. Most people are already driving in the 70 to 75 mph range on these roads and that won't change. Based on these dynamics, let's look at some of the myths that have surfaced recently regarding AB 389.

Myth #1: 70 mph will lead to more crashes and more fatalities

The truth is that higher speeds have had just the opposite effect. Slower isn't safer. Since 1995 when the 55 mile per hour National Maximum Speed Limit was repealed, highway speeds have steadily increased to 70 or 75 miles per hour, and beyond. Yet, nationally, the highway fatality rate has dropped 36 percent in that same period.

According to data published by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration for 2011, Indiana, Michigan, Ohio and Minnesota all have achieved lower highway fatality rates than Wisconsin. Incidentally, all have interstate speeds of 70 mph.

The seminal study on traffic speed vs. crash risk was published by David Solomon who worked for the U.S. Department of Commerce. The result was the Solomon Curve, a longstanding traffic engineering concept, which shows the lowest risk of crash involvement occurs with vehicles moving near or slightly above the average speed of traffic. Conversely, accident risk rises dramatically as vehicle speeds drop below the average travel speed.

Why is this? Because slower vehicles impede smooth traffic flow and create more conflicts between and among vehicles. This results in higher accident rates. Increasing freeway and expressway speeds to 70 mph, where appropriate, will encourage slower drivers to speed up to better match the flow of traffic, resulting in fewer, not more, accidents.

Myth #2: 70 mph will lead to more severe crashes

Since actual travel speeds will not change significantly with a posted speed of 70 mph, we would not expect to see any appreciable change in crash severity. In addition, making sure that highway speeds are set at their safe and appropriate levels will help prevent accidents in the first place.

Myth #3: 70 mph will significantly increase fuel consumption

When the 55 mph National Maximum Speed Limit was enacted in 1973, federal officials predicted a 2.2 percent savings in gasoline consumption. Instead, the U.S. Dept. of Transportation found fuel savings to be 1 percent, and some independent studies determined the savings to be even lower.

Why so little? Because the 55 mph speed limit didn't change driver behavior to any great degree. The same holds true today—increasing the posted speed by 5 mph won't have much impact on the speeds people actually drive and therefore will have little, if any, impact on fuel consumption. In fact, a 70 mph posted speed may promote fuel savings by enhancing the smooth efficient flow of traffic.

AB 389 represents good public policy for Wisconsin's 4.1 million drivers because it promotes safer highways and smooth, efficient traffic flow. It is for these reasons that the National Motorists Association joins Representative Tittl and the cosponsors of AB 389 in urging passage of this bill.

Thank you very much.