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## Speed limits could climb across state

**Bill would base how fast you travel on rate used by 85% of motorists**

**By Howard Fischer**

CAPITOL MEDIA SERVICES

PHOENIX - Arizona could soon have a new way of setting speed limits on state roads and freeways: Majority rules.

Legislation approved Tuesday by the Senate Transportation Committee would require Arizona officials to set the speed limit on all state-maintained roads at what 85 percent of the motorists are driving at now.

And if most of the drivers are exceeding currently posted speed limits, the limits would be raised.

The proposal covers multi-lane interstate highways that run between cities, as well as all numbered two-lane roads throughout the state.

Senate Bill 1324 is only one of three approved by the panel - and now going to the full Senate for votes - that could result in higher speeds on state roads.

A second measure, Senate Bill 1330, would allow the Arizona Department of Transportation to boost speeds on highways outside of metropolitan areas beyond the current 75 mile-per-hour limit to whatever the agency believes is appropriate.

And a third would cut the administrative penalty for those who violate whatever speed limits eventually are set. Now, a speeding ticket accumulates three points against a person's driver's license; Senate Bill 1321 would cut that to one.

With mandatory license suspension beginning at 12 points, that would mean someone could get 11 speeding tickets in a 12-month period without losing driving privileges.

The moves came over the protests of police departments and insurance companies, which said higher speeds will lead to more accidents.

"The faster people drive, the more people get injured," said John Keeler, president of the Arizona chapter of the National Safety Council.

But Sen. Thayer Verschoor, R-Gilbert, said that isn't true. "The safest speed is the speed that 85 percent - the 85th percentile - is driving," he said.

"The dangerous speed is where we have speed differentiation," he said, where some motorists are traveling at or below the speed limit while others are going with the flow of traffic at a higher speed.

"That's where you have the highest opportunity for collisions," Verschoor said. "You have people switching lanes a lot to get around to pass, you have dangerous passing, and every time one vehicle passes another vehicle that creates a dangerous situation."

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Arizona Department of Transportation lobbyist Kevin Biesty said his agency already considers motorist habits when setting speed limits. But Biesty said his agency also takes into account things like road characteristics, sight distance, roadside development, pedestrian activity and the number of crashes over a 12-month period.

But Verschoor said he doesn't believe ADOT is, in fact, giving the current practices proper weight.

The change in the point system also is based on Verschoor's argument that speed, by itself, is not a major cause of accidents.

Under current law a motorist who gets at least eight points in a 12-month period has to attend traffic survival school. But if the driver already has been to those classes in the last 24 months, he or she loses the license for three months.

Three speeding tickets, at three points apiece, is enough to trigger that sanction; under Verschoor's bill, it would take eight violations to mandate traffic school.

More than 12 points is an automatic three-month suspension. A motorist who accumulates 18 points loses a license for six months; 24 points or more translates into one year without driving privileges.

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