

OLD CARS AND NEW LAWS

PLUS WHAATSUP HERE AND THERE

By Larry Becker



A growing number of states are working on ways to increase the readability of both standard and specialty license plates, which state and law enforcement officials say has become an increasing public safety issue. Sgt Bill Murphy of the Pima, Az, county sheriff's department says that even officers trained in identifying license plates are unable to make out some of the plates. Proposed legislation in Arizona seeks to standardize future special license plates by minimizing clutter backgrounds and constricting the organization's logos into a 3-inch square. In Florida, the Dept. of Highway Safety and Motor Vehicles is revising its standard plate design. It says the current embossed numbers and letters are difficult to see from a distance. In Ohio, the problem is the plate's material. Legislation signed by Gov. Kasich in the first week of April, permits plates to be made of material other than galvanized steel. In Texas, the state updated its standard license plate in July of 2012, with larger plate characters and updated groupings. The changes allow for a "better flow for people to remember the numbers and letters," says Robert Acosta, a Texas DMV customer service representative. Arizona offers 53 specialty plate designs, a challenge for law enforcement officers and witnesses to crimes to easily identify a plate as one from Arizona. About 1.8 million Arizona drivers use specialty license plates. Other states, such as California have a higher number of specialty license plates issued.

A bill, HR 1462, has been introduced in the U. S. House of Representatives to reform the Renewable Fuel Standard (RFS). The bill is an attempt o stop the increase of ethanol to gasoline. The EPA has decided that the ethanol addition should be increased from 10% to 15% SEMA is supporting the bill.

On April 17th, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that police should seek a warrant before testing the blood of drivers suspected of being drunk, as several justices complained that the decision could leave police as confused as the drivers. However, noting that alcohol dissipates from the blood stream at a steady pace, all nine justices agreed that police should be able to blood test at least in cases in which breathalyzer tests have been refused and warrants prove evasive.

A recent survey shows that the worst freeways in the U.S. are the cross-Bronx Expressway in New York, where traffic chugs along at 13 mph, and the 405 freeway in Los Angeles area's San Fernando Valley, where traffic averages 14 mph.

Not all of the following state bills are laws at this time. They have been recently introduced and are under consideration by the respective state legislatures.

ALABAMA

Alabama State Parks are considering a “state park pass” for vehicles in response to a tight 2013 budget. Alabama parks are not supported by sate taxes. Passes could be in use this summer.

ALASKA

Some drivers received a reprieve from removing their studded snow tires by April 15th. Dept. of Public Safety Commissioner Joe Masters moved the deadline to May 1st due to recent snow and ice storms.

ARIZONA

The Surprise City Council has decided not to renew its contract with Redflex to manage the community's photo enforcement cameras. The city will stop using the cameras as of May 3rd. Police Chief said the program brought in about \$150,900 for city services since May 2010, but it cost the city \$340,700.

CALIFORNIA

The opening of the new span of the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge may be delayed due to the discovery of broken bolts that are the key to the bridge's ability to withstand a seismic shock. It will take months to replace the bolts, but Caltrans is hopeful that they will be able to open the bridge by Labor. Last year, questions were raised about Caltrans engineers falsifying some safety test results. An investigation by Caltrans deemed that the bridge was safe, but dismissed four engineering safety inspectors. An expert panel assembled by the Legislative Analyst's Office is conducting its own investigation and expects a report by June 30th. The broken bolts are 3 inches in diameter and up to 24 feet long. The new span has cost \$6.4 billion so far and there is no repair cost estimate available at this time. In a report released by Caltrans on April 1st, bolts built by Dyson Corp, may have failed quality

control tests by the agency. Dyson Corp. also built at least 14 other parts for the suspension span job have failed Caltrans quality tests- far more failures than any other supplier on the contract, according to Caltrans records obtained by the Sacramento Bee newspaper. Normally, parts that fail such tests are rejected. The opening of the span may be delayed. (Information courtesy of article in the Sacramento Bee, April 2nd issue).

State Auditor, Elaine Howie, has found issues with management of money raised through the specialty license plate program intended to fight terrorism and protect the environment, including more than \$1 million in expenditures that were “unallowable or unsupported” under the law. The audit also found that the specialty plate program as a whole missed out on an estimated \$22 million in revenues over two years because the DMV failed to collect fees on special plates that owners have taken off their vehicles but haven’t cancelled. Vehicle owners were undercharged in other cases. The DMV raised concerns about the cost of updating the agency’s database capabilities to track those plates. (It’s only the taxpayer’s money that the state is wasting, so why should they worry).

The city of Los Angeles has unveiled a smart phone app that lets residents report potholes, pay city utility bills and look up dog parks. They can even snap photos to accompany reports of potholes or graffiti.

Los Angeles has synchronized every one of its 4,500 traffic signals across 469 square miles – the first major metropolis in the world to do so, officials said – raising the almost fantastic prospect, in which in theory, of driving Western Avenue from the Hollywood Hills to the San Pedro waterfront without stopping. But with the number of cars on the road continuing to rise (almost 7 million commuters already on the road each day at rush hour, even the systems boosters admit that it may not be enough to prevent gridlock from growing worse. The system uses sensors in the road that measures the flow of traffic, hundreds of cameras and a centralized computer system that makes constant adjustments to keep cars moving as smooth as possible.

The city of Burbank has banned the traveling billboard trucks from the city streets. The trucks are ones who have large advertising billboards mounted on them and they travel around the city.

Officials say drivers are exploiting a glitch in the Golden Gate Bridge’s transition from human toll takers to an all electronic system. The Marin Independent Journal reports that many drivers are giving themselves toll discounts by using the carpool lanes reserved for cars with at least 3 riders. Officials have designated lane No. 2, the second from the right for carpools from 5 to 9 a.m. and 4 to 6 p.m. weekdays. This lane gives the automatic discount to anyone passing through. While camera technology is able to read license plate and access tolls, it cannot count bodies. The toll for the carpool lane is \$3; the regular toll is \$5 for people using FasTrak transponders and \$6 for those who pay by mail. Bridge officials have asked Ca. Highway Patrol for help catching the cheaters. A carpool lane violation comes with a \$465 fine.

There is a proposal to build massive water diversion tunnels beneath the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta, is a major undertaking by itself. It would also require rerouting and reconfiguring three state highways to handle a decade of heavy construction traffic. It would also require new interchanges on Hwy. 4 and 12. The state Transportation Department estimates that it will cost \$265 million to alter the highways. The Highway 160 detours would have to be relocated again once the intakes are built. Some of the highways are designated as scenic highways. It may take years before all of the problems are resolved and construction begins.

AB 724- This proposal would apply to drivers who get licensed for the first time at age 18 or 19. It would require 18 & 19 year old novice drivers to complete a 30-hour driver education course and six hours of professional driver training before being subject to the same one year nighttime and occupancy restrictions as 16 & 17 year olds. A provisional license would have to be held for 12 months or until age 20 to receive a full license.

AB 113 proposes to change the existing provisional program for 16 and 17 year olds by making the nighttime restriction to 10 p.m. and increasing the age for passengers to 21 years old. These provisions would be lifted when a driver turns 18.

COLORADO

The city of Boulder began enforcing an ordinance that bans smoking on the city's popular Pearl Street Mall in the first week of April. The smoking ban took effect Jan. 18th, but officers have only been giving out warnings because "No Smoking" signs had not yet been installed.

CONNECTICUT

Legislation that threatened to disallow the use of year-of-manufacture license plates has been amended in committee to continue to allow the use of these plates. Under the original bill, the owner of an antique, rare or special interest motor vehicle who was authorized to display a year-of-manufacture plate could continue to display the plate until the registration period expired, however, upon renewal of registration, the owner would have been required to display a current registration plate. SEMA lobbied to get the amendment passed.

D.C. – WASHINGTON

The city has reduced its fines for speeding. The fine for driving 11 to 15 mph over the speed limit will decrease from \$100 to \$92; 16 to 20 mph will go down from \$150 to \$100.

DELAWARE

During a state wide safety campaign in March, 271 drivers were cited for seat belt violations, 13 for failing to properly buckle-up kids and 73 citations for cellphone offenses.

The state is considering a multiyear, \$180 million project to add one lane each direction to State Highway 1 between state Highway 273 and the Chesapeake and Delaware Canal's south side.

FLORIDA

Gov. Scott has signed a repeal of a law requiring foreign visitors to have international driving permits. Under a law that took effect in January, foreign drivers who didn't have a \$25 permit translating their license information into English could have been charged with driving without a license. The state later learned the permit requirements for an international driving treaty.

GEORGIA

The House has approved a proposal to lower the allowable blood alcohol limits to .08 for hunters and anyone driving a water vessel. Senate Bill 136 would limit the same as it is for anyone operating a motor vehicle, down from .10.

HAWAII

Oahu has a pothole problem. A survey found some 200 roads have failed. Others were deemed serious, very poor or poor, east Oahu has the highest percentage of damaged roads.

IDAHO

Legislation that would have increased annual registration fees for vehicles 8,000 pounds or less has died when the Idaho Legislature adjourned for the year.

ILLINOIS

Illegal immigrants would be eligible to get state driver's licenses under a bill introduced on April 1st. Immigrants would have to prove they're state and federal taxes and have an ID card from their country to qualify.

IOWA

Iowa City officials say that a petition in support of banning the use of red-light cameras and drones did not have enough signatures to qualify to be put on the November ballot. The City Council approved the enforcement cameras in 2012.

KENTUCKY

The U.S. Forest Service is proposing to raise from \$7 to \$10 the winter camping fee for the Koomer Ridge Campground in Wolfe County. The increase would go into effect in November and would increase to \$14 in 2015.

LOUISIANA

A proposed state law would make it illegal for drivers to post status updates or anything else to social media websites. The proposal by Sen. Dale Erdey has been approved by a senate committee without objections.

The Lafayette City-Paris Council has delayed voting on a proposal to offer amnesty on late penalties for 29,000 delinquent parking tickets until some time in May.

MAINE

The Maine Turnpike opened its first high-speed toll plaza on April 1st, with drivers using E-ZPass to pay their tolls electronically. Transportation crews have began installing new energy-efficient light

blubs along interstate highways. They are replacing 350 in 105 light towers in Kittery, Saco, Portland and several other communities.

MARYLAND

The state senate has given final approval to the state's first gas tax increase in 20 years. It has been sent to Gov. O'Malley for his signature. The measure would put a 1% sales tax on a gallon of gasoline beginning in July. It includes a provision to raise the tax automatically to adjust for inflation.

The grace period for speed cameras in Annapolis is over, and police said drivers caught going 12 mph over the posted speed limit will incur \$40 fines. Maj. Scoot Baker said police issued more than 300 warning tickets between March 5th and April 8th.

The city of Baltimore suspended the city's speed and red-light camera program indefinitely in mid April after two "clerical mistakes" involving citations were found.

MINNESOTA

Gov. Dayton has signed a bill to rename 11 miles of state Hwy 23 after Cold Springs Police Officer Tom Decker, who was killed while on duty in November of 2012.

NEW HAMPSHIRE

The state is considering a proposal selling naming rights roadside rest areas with the proceeds being used to operate the rest areas.

State police are using an "E-Ticket" system that issues traffic tickets by computer from the trooper's cruiser and transmits the data to state agencies.

NEW MEXICO

A new law will expand the state's Amber Alert system, used to help search for abducted children. The system will be able to cover children abducted by a parent or other family member, starting June 14th.

NEW YORK

The state will install 360 charging stations for electric vehicles and plug-in hybrids across the state as part of a five year initiative to expand their use. The goal is a statewide network of up to 3,000 public and workplace charging stations.

NORTH CAROLINA

The DMV processed 314 applications statewide for special driver's licenses on the first day for young people who qualified under the federal deferred Action For Childhood Arrivals program.

Legislation to provide for the prompt issuance of titles to owners of out-of-state motor vehicles that are 35 years old or older has been introduced. Under the bill, if a required inspection and verification is not conducted by DMV within 10 days after receiving a request and the inspection has no probable

cause to believe that the ownership documents or public identification number does not match the vehicle being examined, the vehicle will be deemed to have satisfied all inspection and verification requirements and the title will be issued to the owner within 10 days. The legislation is being supported by SEMA.

The Dept. of Transportation's updated state transportation maps are available for free at welcome centers, rest areas and DOT offices.

NORTH DAKOTA

The state Legislature has endorsed a measure aimed at strengthening penalties for drunken drivers. Along with increased fines and other penalties, the legislature would require jail time or community service work for first-time DUI offenders who have blood alcohol content of 0.16%. That's twice the state's legal limit of 0.08%.

OHIO

Opponents of a plan by Cincinnati officials to lease out city parking had enough signatures to put a referendum to a November vote.

OREGON

State lawmakers are considering a bill that would set a cap on how much so-called "predatory towers" – which patrol and tow cars from private parking lots – can charge drivers to get their cars back, the Statesman Journal reports.

RHODE ISLAND

The Rhode Island Turnpike and bridge Authority has approved tolls for the new Sakonnet River Bridge, including a 75-cent charge for those with an in-state E-ZPass transponder. Drivers with an out-of-state E-ZPass will be charged \$3.75, and drivers with no E-ZPass will be billed for \$5.25. On April 2nd, the Portsmouth Town Council met to draft a federal lawsuit to stop the state from imposing tolls on the Sakonnet Bridge beginning in July.

TEXAS

A new border crossing has opened, reconnecting visitors to Big Bend National Park with a tiny Mexican town across the Rio Grande River. Pedestrians are ferried by rowboat from one side to the other. Previously, residents of Boquillas had to travel at least 240 miles to the nearest- port of entry.

VERMONT

The House gave preliminary approval to a transportation bill that will raise gasoline taxes by about 7 cents per gallon to help pay for highway repairs.

VIRGINIA

On the first weekend in April, drivers did not need an E-ZPass to use the new express lanes on the Capital Beltway as the state is seeking ways to increase use. January data showed ridership was below expectations, losing \$11.3 million in the first six weeks.

WISCONSIN

State Rep. John Jagler wants to double the penalty for drivers who fail to drive cautiously when passing garbage trucks. Four to eight sanitation workers are killed by cars each year while on the job, according to the National Solid Waste Management Association.

Legislation has been introduced in the state Senate to allow minor modifications to collector vehicles, except for former military vehicles, historic military vehicles and collector vehicles from importer certification label requirements, and expand rights for historic military vehicles. A companion bill will be introduced in the state House. The measure seeks to allow modifications to vehicles registered as collector vehicles, as long as the body of these vehicles is not modified. Currently upgrades such as safety glass, radial tires, a radio or hubcaps, are reasons to deny registration. This bill will allow changes that retain the spirit of historic authenticity.

WHAT'S UP HERE AND THERE

*Five years ago, rural America was giddy for ethanol. Backed by government subsidies and mandates, hundreds of ethanol plants rose among the golden fields of the corn-belt, providing jobs and businesses to small towns and provided farmers with a new market for their corn crops. Now, nearly 10% of the nation's ethanol plants have stopped production over the last year, in part because the drought that has ravaged much of the nation's crops has pushed commodity prices so high that ethanol has become too expensive to produce.
(Information from an article by John Eligon and Matthew I. Wald of The New York Times).*

*There is still much debate about the new rule by federal safety officials that would make 'Black Box' technology mandatory in vehicles in 2014 as to how the information would be used. Most states have adopted new laws to prevent the privacy of the data. In California, data may be downloaded only with the owner's consent, with a court order, for safety research or for auto diagnostics. Arkansas, North Dakota and Oregon say that owners cannot be required to disclose the data as a condition of an insurance payment or settlement. Virginia says insurers cannot adjust rates based solely on an owner's refusal to share data. And more than a dozen states require written notice to owners of the use event data recorders (aka "Sensing diagnostic modules").
(Information from an article by Marc Rotenberg, executive director of the Electronic Privacy Information Center)*

The New Hampshire Legislature is considering a bill that would end free admission for people 65 and older at state parks. Seniors would pay the same day-use fee as other adults, usually \$4 to \$5. (I guess that New Hampshire does not like seniors, but does like their money).

Should have had a Big Mac instead! A Salem Oregon driver said he was distracted by a Carl's Jr's hamburger, he was eating when his vehicle hit a cable meant to prevent drivers from going on railroad tracks, the Statesman Journal reports John Berry was able to get out of his car before it was hit by an Amtrack passenger train.

According to a new study by MIT, seniors who exercise regularly tend to be able to drive longer. Exercises help seniors to be flexible and use muscles (such as turning their necks to check traffic around them) and able to be more alert while driving.

Tesla, the electric car maker, lost money again last year as it sought to build factories and dealer showrooms and service centers. A report by the USA Today newspaper, shows that the company's revenues doubled to \$413 million in 2012, negative cash flow from operations also doubled, to \$266 million from \$128 million in 2011. Tesla's net loss for last year also rose significantly - by 56% to \$396 million from \$254 million in 2011. In other words, the company lost 96 cents for every dollar of revenue it took in. The company has stopped manufacturing its flashy roadster, the Model S. Company CEO, Elon Musk, is still upbeat about his company.

Electric car maker, Fisher Automotive, laid off most of its workers on April 5th. Last month, it retained a bankruptcy law firm. It has been unsuccessful in its search for new investors.

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