

OLD CARS AND NEW LAWS

PLUS WHATSUUP HERE AND THERE



by Larry Becker

More than 61,000 U.S. bridges are structurally deficient according to a new analysis by the American Road and Transportation Builders Association. The report on the state of U.S. bridges comes with federal highway and transit funding set to expire on May 1st unless Congress acts to do something about the funding. A year ago, there was 63,000 structurally deficient bridges, so there is a slight improvement.

A federal judge has ruled that the Great Smoky Mountains National Park has the legal right to charge a \$4-per-night fee for backcountry campers, the first time the nation's most visited national park has levied such a fee, according to WBIR-TV. Citizens group Southern Forest Watch, which claimed that the park failed to adequately weigh public opposition to the fee, was against the charge.

GM announced that many Chevy Volts, GM's electric car, are ending their leasing period and will be offered for sale from various GM dealers. But, before you rush out to buy one, many of the vehicles will need battery replacement soon and can be very expensive.

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

ALASKA

Alaska drivers will have the choice of a retro look when they obtain new license plates. The state is bringing back plates that feature red lettering on white plates and a grizzly bear standing on its hind legs. It's a reconfiguration version of an Alaska license plate last issued in 1976. Drivers can also choose the current style: yellow-gold plates with blue lettering that reflect colors of the Alaskan flag.

In the first week of April, Canada began closing the road linking Hyder with nearby Stewart, British Columbia, from midnight to 8 a.m. to cut costs.

ARKKANSAS

Legislation to allow the State Highway Commission to implement a pilot program that charges drivers based on vehicle miles traveled has been approved by the House of Public Transportation Committee. The bill now moves to the full House of Representatives for a vote by all members. Under the measure, participants in the program would be taxed 1.5 cents per each mile the subject vehicle travels on Arkansas roadways. Note: The sponsor of the bill withdrew it during the first week of April.

CALIFORNIA

Legislation to allow an owner of a motor vehicle that is subject to the smog-check program to pay a \$200 smog abatement fee in lieu of passing a smog test was considered by the Assembly Transportation Committee in the third week of April.

DMV had expected about 1.4 million undocumented immigrants to apply for drivers licenses over a 3 year period. Just 3 months after driver's licenses became available to immigrants living in California illegally, 493,998 have sought licenses. About 203,000 have been issued licenses. DMV has a backlog of issuing drivers licenses at this time.

AB 1356 would authorize law enforcement to use technology to test drives roadside for drug impairment using oral fluids. Like

Breathalyzers used to gauge alcohol use, devices to test oral fluid are far swifter than blood or urine tests.

Legislation has been introduced to require the manufacturer of designated consumer products, including automotive products, to include all ingredients on the product label and online on the manufacturer's website.

D.C. WASHINGTON

As drivers figure out where the city's speed cameras are placed, revenue from tickets has dropped by 55% in fiscal 2014, after the city took in almost \$76 million the year before.

FLORIDA

A Florida House Committee has approved amended legislation that originally directed the Dept. of Transportation to undertake a study of the impact of implementing a system that charges drivers based on vehicle miles traveled (VMT). Under the amendment, the entire program has been deleted from the bill. However, a Florida Senate version of the bill has been approved by the Senate Transportation Committee and is proceeding in the Regulated Industries Committee.

Brevard County tourism officials decided to abandon plans to build a \$3 million futuristic -looking welcome center off of Interstate 95.

The Milton City Council has unanimously rejected an event application for a "red-neck" car and boat show downtown, taking issue with the rowdy commotions surrounding the Southern term. (It seems that you can't have fun anywhere now!)

Transportation engineers have launched a \$418,826 study of five of Brevard County's most dangerous stretches of roadway for bicyclists and pedestrians.

GEORGIA

DeKalb County announced three new public electric-vehicle charging stations to accommodate the area's high number of alternative-fuel car owners.

HAWAII

Mauri County Council members have taken a step toward subsidizing the Molokai-to-Mauri ferry to keep it afloat.

Kauai will spend \$214,000 to study traffic problems plaguing the island's North Shore and South Shore. Traffic leading to Hanalei Bridge can back up into Hanalei town, frustrating residents and visitors.

IDAHO

The Idaho State Senate has approved a 10-cent increase in the gas tax. The tax, which will help partially fund an effort to repave highways and public roads, will be phased in through July.

Under an agreement reached by the House and Senate, legislation that threatened to increase annual vehicle registration fees by \$25 for all motor vehicles was reduced to \$21 and sent to the Governor for his signature and enactment into law. The bill originally called for a \$15 increase and passed by the Assembly, but was amended by the Senate and passed to increase it to \$25.

ILLINOIS

The House approved a bill that calls for creation of a universal specialty license plate that can be sold to support charitable causes, which would be defined by a large sticker. The state's 109 specialty license plates can be confusing for police.

IOWA

The Iowa Senate has passed a bill requiring cyclists to use a rear-facing light at night. The law, though, would allow cyclists to avoid a fine by proving they have a light within three days of being ticked.

A bill to allow the issuance of a single license plate did not make the deadline for the Senate, but will be held over until 2016.

KANSAS

The officials of Overland Park have approved spending \$27 million over seven years to install 165 miles of bicycle lanes throughout the city.

KENTUCKY

Legislation has been put in place for a new and more beneficial procedure for older vehicles has been signed into law by Gov. Beshear. Under the new law, vehicles 20 years old and older would no longer be presumed to be in “original factory” or “classic” condition. Original factory and classic vehicles are currently assessed as high-value collectibles. This measure instead provides three options for assessing the value of these vehicles: (1) if the vehicle was registered in Kentucky in its 19th year, it will be assessed at the value it was assessed at in its 19th year and that value will be reduced by 10% each year, after its 19th year, (2) if the vehicle was not registered in Kentucky in its 19th year, it will be valued according to the average “trade-in” value in its 19th year, which would be reduced by 10% for each year after the vehicle's 19th year, and or (3) a valuation administrator would conduct an assessment of the vehicle to determine the correct value, which could be reduced by 10% for each year thereafter.

MARYLAND

Legislation to increase the age requirement for vehicles eligible for registration as “historic motor vehicles” has been amended and approved by the House Environment and Transportation Committee to raise the age requirement from 20 years to 30 years old. The bill has

been approved by the full House of Delegates and is now pending in the Senate Judicial Proceeding Committee.

Senate legislation to require the issuance of a single license plate for historic vehicles and rods has been approved by the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee and sent to the Senate for a full Senate vote.

Amended legislation to require the issuance of a single license plate for historic vehicles and street rods has been approved by the full Maryland House of Delegates. The bill now moves to the Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee for consideration. Under the amendment, the single-plate option would be available to owners of historic vehicles that are 60 years old and older. The bill no longer has this option available to street rods or late-model historic vehicles.

MASSACHUSETTS

Boston will replace parking meters citywide with new machines that will allow drivers to pay with credit cards, the Boston Globe reports. The new meters, estimated to cost about \$6 million, could one day be used with an app for smartphones.

An emergency measure making some narrow streets in Boston one-way during storms, may become permanent, according to the Boston Globe.

MISSOURI

Legislation to require the state to charge and collect a miles-driven fee of up to \$200 for a one-year vehicle registration and up to \$400 for a two year registration has been introduced. The fee would be charged in addition to all other registration fees and would not replace the gas tax. In addition to creating privacy concerns, the bill seeks to penalize national efforts to create a more fuel-efficient vehicle fleet by taxing drivers based on vehicle mileage. As gas revenues decrease due to hybrids and electric vehicles, states and cities look for new sources of revenue.

MINNESOTA

Republican legislators have unveiled their transportation plan which would spend \$7 billion on roads and bridges in the next 10 years, but doesn't raise the gas tax. The plan is a marked contrast to the \$11 billion plan proposed earlier by Gov. Dayton according to the St. Cloud Times.

The Metropolitan Council is considering a proposal to build a multimillion-dollar pedestrian bridge leading from the new Viking stadium, KARE TV reports.

MONTANA

Maintenance checks examining the quality of infrastructure of the state's national parks conclude they need \$267 million in repairs. The bulk of the project will be focused on deteriorated roads, according to the Billings Gazette. The parks are facing the same problems that national parks in Arizona have.

In the last week of March, the Montana Senate passed a bill raising the speed limit on Interstates from 75 mph to 80 mph with higher fines.

NEVADA

Legislation that would drastically alter the requirements for vehicles eligible for registration as "classic vehicle" has been considered by the State Transportation Committee, but no vote was taken during the first week of April. Under the bill, the special would only be allowed for passenger cars and require the owners to provide proof satisfaction to the state that the vehicle is driven solely for personal use and no more than 5,000 miles during an annual registration period. The owner also would be required to have another passenger car or motorcycle registered during the entire registration period. The bill would also exclude light-duty commercial vehicles from eligibility. In late April, the bill was amended and sent to the Assembly for a vote by all members.

NEW HAMPSHIRE

Legislation to include trucks more than 25 years old or older (regardless of weight) in the definition of eligible “antique motor vehicles” has been approved by the House of Representatives and sent to the Senate Transportation Committee for consideration. In mid-April, the bill was approved and sent to the Governor for her signature and enactment into law.

NEW JERSEY

After 60 years of spanning the Double Creek on East Bay Ave, the picturesque wooden bridge is to be replaced starting in August, at a cost of \$2.2 million.

NEW MEXICO

Legislation to ease the process by which replica cars are titled and registered has been approved by the Senate Corporations and Transportation Committee and moves to the Senate for a full vote. It has already been approved by the House of Representatives. The bill died when the Legislature adjourned for the year in the first week of April.

A planned biofuels project near Jal got a boost from a new oil and gas rule approved by the New Mexico Oil Conservation Commission.

SOUTH CAROLINA

Beginning with specialty license plates, the DMV will start issuing redesigned license tags as of May 1st. The new plates will feature a simpler design to comply with a new law requiring the plates be easier to read.

WASHINGTON

Free coffee signs are returning to Washington State highway rest areas. They had been removed earlier in a budget reduction.

WESTVIRGINIA

Guided tours related to abolitionist John Brown will resume May 23rd and will be offered until June 7th. The tours are conducted by National Park Service rangers from Harper's Ferry National Historical Park.

WYOMING

(Something good for a change) The city of Cheyenne reports that it's two major road reconstruction projects – Logan Ave and 19th St., are ahead of schedule and on budget, city engineer Nathan Beauheim told the Wyoming Tribune Eagle.

WHAATSUUP HERE AND THERE

Mercedes and Nissan announced that they are jointly developing a double-cab, one-ton pickup, which will roughly be based on a midsize Nissan pickup that is not sold in the U.S. The one-ton Mercedes –Benz will be built at the Nissan-Renault plant in Cordoba, Argentina and in Barcelona, Spain. The vehicle will not be sold in the U.S. according to Mercedes-Benz.

A new report issued on April 9th by the University of Michigan Transportation Research Institute projects that 6 to 12 percent of American adults will experience moderate to severe motion sickness while riding in driverless cars. “By switching from driver to passenger, by definition, one gives up control over the direction of motion, and there is no remedies for this”, reports authors Michael Sivak and Brandon Schoettle.

Cadillac has announced that it will add a plug-in hybrid drivetrain to the big CT6 sedan coming later this year, and expects the system to more than double the car's fuel economy. The GMs luxury brand said the car will be sold in a number of markets, including China and the U.S., but gave no timetable.

Many tractor-trailers on the nation's roads are driven faster than the 75 mph their tires are designed to handle, a practice that has been linked to wrecks and blowouts, but has largely escaped the attention of highway officials. Nearly all truck tires have been built for a maximum sustained speed of 75 mph since the middle of the last decade, when drivers across the vast majority of the U.S. were allowed to go no faster than 65 or 70 mph. But 14 states, mainly west of the Mississippi River, now have speed limits of 75, 80 and 85 mph in parts of Texas. Some of those states acted without consulting the tire industry. Safety advocates and tire experts say that habitually driving faster than a tires rated speed can generate excessive heat that damages the rubber, with potentially catastrophic results. (Information from article by Tom Krisher of The Associated Press.)

Auto makers are packing more and more cameras in their new vehicles. The cameras allow cars to "read" speed signs and stay in the lane. Some record trips for playback later. Auto makers are experimenting with using them in place of rear-view mirrors, although current U.S. law doesn't allow it. Cameras will play a bigger role, too, in the race for the self-driving car.

The national Highway Safety Administration has made two changes to the rule governing the identification number (TIN) that appears on all new and retreaded motor-vehicle tires sold in the U.S. The first change expands the two-symbol from to three since the NSTHA is running out of two-symbol codes for identifying specific tire plants. The second change standardizes the length of the TIN to eliminate confusion that may arise from the current lengths. The new length is 13 symbols for new tires and seven symbols for retreaded ones.

According to an article by James R. Healy of USA Today, owners of gas-electric hybrids and battery electric vehicles are less likely to trade for another one, according to data from auto-buying and research site Edmonds.com. Even more surprising, they are increasingly likely to shift to SUVs.



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