

Bill 50 Legislation Requires Further Study

Ray Bacquie, iTRANS Consulting Inc.
(Written while president of Ontario Traffic Conference)

The Ontario Traffic Conference is pleased to provide input on Bill 50, and have taken the opportunity to review it as presented in its first reading May 16th, 2001. We are currently unaware of similar legislation that limits the ability of truck drivers to pass and choose an appropriate speed for long distances on a 4-lane freeway environment. Hence we do not know whether the legislation would have a positive or negative result overall. We recommend that the impacts to traffic operation be investigated with further input prior to implementing such legislation.

We understand that there are anticipated operational benefits from Bill 50. These benefits include a reduction of lane changing by heavy vehicles, and fewer conflicts as a result. There may also be a reduction in frustration and the potential for aggressive driving that results from vehicles obstructed by trucks driving side-by-side. However, these potential benefits should be considered in light of potential operational problems that may arise from Bill 50.

The proposed legislation does not define "obstruction" which may or may not include a slow moving vehicle. If a slow moving vehicle is not included in the definition of an obstruction, then the following operational problems may result from Bill 50:

- The potential for increased frustration and aggressive driving by truck drivers unable to pass slower vehicles
- Truck drivers limited to the right lane will not be able to move to the left lane to accommodate vehicles merging onto the highway
- On corridors with high truck volumes, capacity and sign visibility problems may arise

Permissive legislation, such as HTA Section 186 that allows for the prohibition of trucks in the left lane on a site-by-site basis may be more appropriate. Bill 50 affects all 4-lane freeway corridors, despite the range of traffic characteristics and road geometry.

Furthermore, the HTA regulations direct slower vehicles to stay in the right lane and that vehicles should pass on the left, (Sections 147 and 148). This existing legislation can be enforced today to discourage the discretionary use of the left lane by trucks.

Without further information on the impacts of the legislation, it is unclear whether it represents an improvement to the traffic operations on many corridors. We trust that an investigation of the impacts of the legislation under a variety of conditions will be undertaken prior to implementing Bill 50.

I appreciate the opportunity to comment on the proposed Bill 50, and look forward to further correspondence on this matter. We have forwarded similar comments to the Minister's office.