

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
HOUSE TRANSPORTATION STANDING COMMITTEE

April 7, 2005

1:39 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Representative Jim Elkins, Co-Chair
Representative Carl Gatto, Co-Chair
Representative Vic Kohring
Representative Bill Thomas
Representative Mary Kapsner
Representative Woodie Salmon

MEMBERS ABSENT

Representative Mark Neuman

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

SENATE BILL NO. 63

"An Act relating to road signs encouraging the use of safety belts."

- MOVED SB 63 OUT OF COMMITTEE

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: SB 63

SHORT TITLE: USE SEAT BELT ROAD SIGNS

SPONSOR(S): SENATOR(S) STEVENS B

01/19/05	(S)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
01/19/05	(S)	TRA, FIN
02/03/05	(S)	TRA AT 1:30 PM BUTROVICH 205
02/03/05	(S)	<Bill Hearing Postponed to 02/08/05>
02/08/05	(H)	TRA AT 1:30 PM CAPITOL 17
02/08/05	(S)	Moved CSSB 63(TRA) Out of Committee
02/08/05	(S)	MINUTE(TRA)
02/09/05	(S)	TRA RPT CS 5DP
		SAME TITLE
02/09/05	(S)	DP: HUGGINS, FRENCH, KOOKESH, THERRIAULT, COWDERY
03/07/05	(S)	FIN AT 9:00 AM SENATE FINANCE 532
03/07/05	(S)	Scheduled But Not Heard
03/09/05	(S)	FIN AT 9:00 AM SENATE FINANCE 532
03/09/05	(S)	Heard & Held

03/09/05 (S) MINUTE(FIN)
 03/14/05 (S) FIN RPT 4DP
 03/14/05 (S) DP: WILKEN, OLSON, DYSON, STEDMAN
 03/14/05 (S) FIN AT 9:30 AM SENATE FINANCE 532
 03/14/05 (S) Moved SB 63 Out of Committee
 03/14/05 (S) MINUTE(FIN)
 03/18/05 (S) TRANSMITTED TO (H)
 03/18/05 (S) VERSION: SB 63
 03/21/05 (H) READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
 03/21/05 (H) TRA, FIN
 04/07/05 (H) TRA AT 1:30 PM CAPITOL 17

WITNESS REGISTER

CHERYL SUTTON, Staff
 to Senator Ben Stevens
 Alaska State Legislature
 Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Presented SB 63 on behalf of Senator Ben Stevens, Sponsor.

MARK NEIDHOLD, Chief
 Design and Construction Standards
 Department of Transportation & Public Facilities (DOT)
 Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SB 63.

Tiara Wall, Student
 Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified in support of SB 63.

ACTION NARRATIVE

CO-CHAIR CARL GATTO called the House Transportation Standing Committee meeting to order at 1:39:45 PM. Representatives Gatto, Elkins, Kohring, Salmon, and Thomas were present at the call to order. Representative Kapsner arrived as the meeting was in progress.

SB 63-USE SEAT BELT ROAD SIGNS

CO-CHAIR GATTO announced that the only order of business would be SENATE BILL NO. 63 "An Act relating to road signs encouraging the use of safety belts."

CHERYL SUTTON, Staff to Senator Ben Stevens, Alaska State Legislature, said SB 63 is simple but meaningful. It encourages

the posting of memorial signs promoting the use of seatbelts. Under the Highway Fatality Memorial Sign Program, there is no provision for a seatbelt sign, just "Please drive safely" and "Please don't drink and drive." She said SB 63 adds a "Buckle up for safety" sign. Over 55 percent of highway fatalities in Alaska may have been prevented by wearing seatbelts, she noted. The bill allows the loved ones of those killed in traffic accidents while not wearing a seatbelt to request a memorial sign encouraging other drivers to buckle up, she said.

[1:41:42 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR GATTO asked how it can be known if a seatbelt would have prevented the fatality.

MS. SUTTON said there are statistics. Senator Ben Stevens has a constituent who lost a son in such a way. A passenger walked away from that accident simply because she was wearing a seatbelt. The department keeps data on fatalities.

CO-CHAIR GATTO repeated his question.

MS. SUTTON said investigators make that determination.

[1:44:24 PM](#)

MARK NEIDHOLD, Chief, Design and Construction Standards, Department of Transportation & Public Facilities (DOT), said DOT would operate under the premise that if occupants are properly restrained, they have a very good chance of surviving accidents. He said DOT will read the application and accident data, and if there is a fatality and no seatbelt, it would meet the standard.

[1:47:09 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR GATTO asked if DOT would need an application before erecting a sign.

MR. NEIDHOLD said DOT has not yet written regulations, but it would likely follow existing memorial sign regulations, which require a requester to put in an application.

CO-CHAIR GATTO asked about the existing memorial sign program.

MR. NEIDHOLD said that program allows a loved one to apply for a memorial sign that says either "Please drive safely" or "Please don't drink and drive." The department reviews the location to

make sure it is a safe place to put it, and erects the sign, maintaining it for ten years. The cost is about \$500 per sign. The sign has a placard with the sponsor's or the victim's name.

[1:49:59 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR ELKINS asked how DOT would handle it if 20 people died on one corner.

MR. NEIDHOLD said the department would probably put up one sign with multiple placards.

CO-CHAIR ELKINS said the placard is 30 inches long.

MR. NEIDHOLD said it sounds big but at 12 feet off the pavement, it is comparatively small.

CO-CHAIR ELKINS asked if the signs are distracting.

[1:51:54 PM](#)

MR. NEIDHOLD said proliferation of signs is a concern of the department, and that is why it supports SB 63. It has very little control over non-DOT memorials, and this gives DOT placement oversight and decision powers. It gives DOT a mechanism to control what goes up, making sure signs are crash-worthy and safely located.

[1:53:43 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR ELKINS said it is commendable that DOT wants to take the heat on dealing with this issue.

REPRESENTATIVE THOMAS asked about the effective date and how long ago could the accident have occurred.

[1:55:45 PM](#)

MR. NEIDHOLD said the sign can exist for ten years.

CO-CHAIR GATTO asked about retroactivity.

[1:56:14 PM](#)

MS. SUTTON said the legislation is not meant to be retroactive. Memorial signs are already available with different wording.

MR. NEIDHOLD said current regulations do not set an application time limit. If DOT were flooded with requests, it would push for a regulation change. He said DOT has not seen that problem.

[1:57:59 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR GATTO asked if ten years is too long to have a sign up, and then noted that DOT can change the length of time a sign is up without direction from legislature.

REPRESENTATIVE THOMAS asked about monuments of rocks.

[1:59:34 PM](#)

MR. NEIDHOLD said DOT looks at monuments from a traffic safety viewpoint, and a pile of rocks puts others at risks because it is not crash proof or may be distracting. This legislation encourages family members to do the right kind of sign and DOT pays for it, he said.

[2:01:36 PM](#)

REPRESENTATIVE KAPSNER asked about families contributing to the costs.

MS. SUTTON said DOT made a decision not to charge the sign sponsor; it is a public service. Senator Stevens' constituents were willing to pay for a sign, but it was not an option.

[2:03:42 PM](#)

TIARA WALL, 12-year-old student, Juneau, said SB 63 is a good idea to remind drivers to buckle up, and knowing a fatality occurred gives them more incentive. She said in 2003 about 6.32 million crashes occurred and about 63 percent of people were not wearing seatbelts. She noted that if just 90 percent of Americans buckled up, there would be 5,500 fewer deaths and 132,000 fewer injuries. Everyone ends up paying for the accidents through increased taxes, health care, and insurance costs. Signs remind people about the risks, she declared. "Imagine how much pain and misery we could solve," she said. Seat belts provide effective safety in cars, saving 9,500 lives a year. She concluded that SB 63 is a really good idea.

[2:07:05 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR GATTO asked Ms. Wall if she has been in an accident.

MS. WALL said no, but her family was backed into.

CO-CHAIR GATTO said he was suggesting changing the language to say DOT can erect a sign "at or near" the site of an accident, instead of "at" the site.

MS. SUTTON said DOT already has that discretion.

[2:10:53 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR GATTO said words are really important and asked DOT if it is restricted by that specific language.

MR. NEIDHOLD said he would defer to the attorney general.

CO-CHAIR GATTO said DOT can simply define the site as larger, so he can live with the current language.

[2:13:16 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR GATTO asked about people attaching flowers to signs.

MR. NEIDHOLD said the department doesn't notice that.

[2:14:11 PM](#)

CO-CHAIR ELKINS moved to report SB 63 out of committee with individual recommendations and the accompanying fiscal notes.

There being no objection, SB 63 moved from the House Transportation Standing Committee.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the committee, the House Transportation Standing Committee meeting was adjourned at 2:15 p.m. [2:15:01 PM](#)