

2167
Rayburn Bldg.
10:00 A.M.

Testimony of

F. C. Turner
Federal Highway Administrator

on

H. R. 4354, a bill: "To amend section 127 of the U. S. Code relating to vehicle width limitations on the Interstate System, in order to increase such limitations for motor buses."

Prepared for delivery before the Subcommittee on Roads of the House Committee on Public Works.

March 30, 1971

Mr. Chairman and members of the Subcommittee:

I am pleased to have the opportunity to comment on H. R. 4354, a proposal which would permit use of buses on the Interstate System with a width not in excess of one hundred and two inches, or, with the maximum width permitted by a given State under its laws or regulations in effect on January 1, 1971, whichever is the greater.

Currently, Federal highway legislation (23 U. S. C. 127) allows, without loss of a State's apportioned Interstate funds, buses with a maximum width of ninety-six inches, or in the alternative, the maximum widths permitted under State laws or regulations which were in effect on July 1, 1956, and February 1, 1960 with respect to Hawaii.

The Department of Transportation recognizes that certain benefits will perhaps accrue to the bus riders, the bus operators, and the public generally if the proposal under consideration is enacted. While we have no definitive information on these benefits the two major intercity bus companies should be

able to supply study materials relating to the overall value of these buses.

The practical effect of H. R. 4354 would be to allow 102-inch buses, which now operate lawfully on certain highways under State permits, to also utilize the Interstate System. This proposal is identical to H. R. 11619 which was considered by this Committee during the first session of the 91st Congress.

In our previous testimony, safety was our primary consideration in our review of the proposal. It is still our primary concern. Based on the extent of our analysis to date with regard to the potential benefits and safety hazards which would result from the proposed increased bus width, the Department cannot support enactment of H. R. 4354 at this time. We will attempt to arrive at a definitive conclusion as to the actual advantages or disadvantages in a reasonable period of time and advise this Committee as to our final overall recommendation.

In addition, in the past we made some specific recommendations of a technical nature which we still feel are applicable.

First, we recommend that the words "officially approved" should be inserted immediately before "safety devices" in line 3 of page 2 of the bill to limit such devices to those required or permitted by Federal, State or local law or regulation. This language would prohibit the indiscriminate attachment of devices to vehicles in the name of safety, which may in effect create greater hazards than they are designed to prevent.

Second, we recommend elimination of the reference to "tire bulge due to loads" in line 3, page 2 of H. R. 4354. This "tire bulge" language originated many years ago when vehicles were being converted from solid or high pressure pneumatic tires to the pneumatic tires of today. The necessity for this exception no longer exists.

Third, the date, "June 30, 1970", in line 3, page 1 of the bill should be amended to read "June 30, 1972", to provide for application of the bill to fiscal year apportionments which have not already been made.

Fourth, we recommend that the definition of "motor buses" be eliminated from the proposed section 127(b) and be included in the definitions section of title 23 which is section 101. This technical amendment is considered desirable so that all definitions in title 23 will be included in the same section.

As we continue our analysis of this subject it is our feeling that the experience of operating 22,000 buses of 102 inches width on local routes in the U.S. and on long haul routes in Canada and on certain portions of U.S. turnpikes should provide a data base with which to evaluate the safety aspects connected with these buses. However, as I mentioned earlier we are not ready to support enactment of this bill at this time, but we will continue our efforts in studying this matter and will make our recommendations available to this Committee.

Thank you very much.