HB-2169

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MCGILL'S BILL TO EASE TRAFFIC CONGESTION AFTER ACCIDENTS CLEARS STATE HOUSE

Legislation to help ease highway congestion by facilitating the quick clearance of vehicles on limited access highways after accidents passed the state House of Representatives today, said the bill's sponsor, Rep. Gene McGill (R-Montgomery).

“Traffic congestion is a serious issue that affects most families in Montgomery County and the southeastern corner of the state," said McGill, a member of the House Transportation Committee.” For many commuters who use area highways, spending time sitting in traffic takes time away from our families.

“When accidents occur on highways, especially those limited-access roadways, traffic can come to a standstill, sometimes for many hours,” McGill said, noting that sometimes additional accidents can occur because traffic has come to a halt after an initial crash. “That is why we need to find a way to quickly clear those vehicles from the highways and get traffic moving again.”

HB-2169 is designed to facilitate the quick clearance of vehicles on limited access highways by calling for a driver of a vehicle involved in a crash – if at all possible and safe to do so – to drive onto the shoulder or median. The police may also take control of the vehicles involved in the accident and remove them from the area if it constitutes a hazard. This includes vehicles parked within any area of the travel lane or on a highway shoulder or bike lane between 7 a.m. and 9 a.m. and 4 p.m. and 6 p.m., or within 1,000 feet of an entrance or exit ramp.

The legislation also sets a standard for drivers approaching an incident area. Primarily, the driver should obey all traffic control devices, reduce speed and vacate the blocked lane. If there is a violation of this standard that results in serious injury or death, in addition to any other penalty, their license shall be suspended for at least 180 days and no more than two years.

The proposal also states that no one should block traffic unless they are avoiding an accident, at the police's discretion or after a breakdown. If this happens, though, the vehicle should have emergency flashing lights, and, if possible, the driver should move to the shoulder in whatever way possible. A responder may move a vehicle or have the driver move a vehicle out of the way and a police officer can also have the vehicle removed at the owner's expense.

"I am hopeful this bill will not only ease the congestion that plagues our area, but will also help to make our roads and highways safer," McGill added.
In addition, the legislation specifies procedures for accidents in which cargo is spilled onto a freeway or limited access highway. Under the bill, priority would be given to clearing the lanes for traffic, rather than to salvage the cargo. However, any salvage operations should be conducted during non-peak travel hours.

Those individuals and first responders involved in helping accident victims clearing debris, cargo or vehicles from the highway would be authorized to perform these duties free of liability.

The legislation also calls for the establishment of a statewide Incident Management Committee to work out an agreement among first responders on quick clearance standards and procedures. This committee will be comprised of representatives from PennDOT, the State Police, Department of Environmental Protection, PEMA, the towing and recovery industry, as well as regional police, fire, emergency medical service and hazardous material response personnel.

"Although we want to get traffic moving as quickly as possible after an accident, we need to make sure our first responders and law enforcement have what they need to treat victims and to do their investigations properly," McGill said. "That is why the formation of this committee is so important to this issue."

The legislation now goes to the state Senate for consideration.