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## INCREASE RECREATIONAL VEHICLE LENGTH

**House Bill 5140 with committee  
amendment  
First Analysis (3-9-00)**

**Sponsor: Rep. Scott Shackleton  
Committee: Transportation**

### ***THE APPARENT PROBLEM:***

Under section 721 of the Michigan Vehicle Code, pickup trucks equipped with a fifth-wheel assembly may, with certain restrictions, tow two trailers. This double trailer combination is sometimes called a “recreational double”. Drivers must pass a knowledge test to receive their “recreational double” endorsement. (See *BACKGROUND INFORMATION* below.)

Under Michigan law, the total length of the three units constituting the “recreational double”—that is to say, the pickup truck, the fifth-wheel trailer, and the second trailer—when coupled together cannot exceed 59 feet. Further, the gross weight of the second trailer cannot exceed the empty weight either of the truck, or of the fifth-wheel trailer, and the loads being hauled must be balanced. The law also specifies how hitches must attach the components and the manner in which electric brakes on the trailer must operate, and it requires that the trailer be attached in such a way that it does not drift more than three inches to either side of the path of the towing vehicle.

Most states in the Great Lakes region allow 60- or 65-foot “recreational doubles” to travel on their highways. While in Michigan the vehicles cannot exceed 59 feet, they can be up to 60 feet long in Illinois, Minnesota, and Wisconsin, and up to 65 feet long in Indiana and Ohio. The result is that tourists traveling from these states to Michigan are sometimes in violation of Michigan law and penalized.

Some have argued that the maximum allowable length for “recreational doubles” in Michigan should be extended.

### ***THE CONTENT OF THE BILL:***

House Bill 5140 would amend the Michigan Vehicle Code to increase the allowable length of certain recreational vehicles from 59 to 65 feet. Specifically, the bill would require that the total length of the pickup

truck, semitrailer designed for recreational living purposes, and its additional trailer or semitrailer, and load, could not exceed 65 feet on any highways in this state.

MCL 257.721

### ***BACKGROUND INFORMATION:***

To operate a “recreational double”, drivers must have an “R” endorsement on their license. Anyone age 18 or older may apply for the endorsement at a secretary of state branch office. Applicants must pass a test designed to sample the knowledge needed to operate vehicle combinations of this type, although there is no skills test required. There also is a \$10 fee for endorsement. [Drivers who have a Group A commercial driver license with a “T” (double or triple trailers) endorsement may legally operate a “recreational double” without obtaining the “R” endorsement.]

### ***FISCAL IMPLICATIONS:***

The House Fiscal Agency notes that the bill would have no fiscal impact on state or local government. (3-7-00)

### ***ARGUMENTS:***

#### ***For:***

In order to promote tourism in the Great Lakes region, the state’s policy should permit the 60- and 65-foot “recreational doubles” from Indiana, Ohio, Illinois, Minnesota, and Wisconsin to travel on Michigan highways. Currently, they cannot lawfully do so. This creates a barrier for visitors to the state who can be penalized when their vehicles exceed this state’s 59-foot maximum length restriction. The barrier should be

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removed, and the policy changed to extend the maximum allowable length to 65 feet.

***For:***

As amended in committee, this bill would allow 65-foot recreational vehicles to travel on 240 miles of nondesignated routes. However, that length exemption would apply only to “recreational doubles” and not apply to semi-trucks. The prohibition that keeps 65-foot semi-trucks off these routes would stay in place. The nondesignated routes can be opened to recreational doubles because they, unlike semis, are flexible and can more easily navigate the lane widths on nondesignated routes which can be as much as one foot, or two and one-half feet, narrower than the customary 11-foot lane.

***Against:***

A “recreational double” is so large that it is difficult to safely manage on the highway. Indeed, drivers of “recreational doubles” are advised in pamphlets distributed by the secretary of state to avoid backing up without first unhooking the second trailers. Drivers are advised, too, to allow more following distance in order to slow down gradually, and to avoid sudden stops. Even under ideal conditions, it can take almost four times as much distance to stop at 40 miles per hour as it does at 20 miles per hour. The state’s policy should not be to allow longer recreational vehicles when that greater length jeopardizes the safety of drivers on state highways.

***POSITIONS:***

The Michigan Association of Recreational Vehicles and Campgrounds supports the bill. (3-8-00)

The Department of Transportation has no position on the bill. (3-8-00)

The Department of State Police has no position on the bill. (3-8-00)

The Office of the Secretary of State has no position on the bill. (3-8-00)

Analyst: J. Hunault

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■ This analysis was prepared by nonpartisan House staff for use by House members in their deliberations, and does not constitute an official statement of legislative intent.