

Steve Earle

SENATE LOCAL GOVERNMENT
EXHIBIT NO. 1
DATE 1.30.09
BILL NO. SB261

From: Stephanie Millar
Sent: Thursday, January 22, 2009 12:24 PM
To: Andy Sponseller (winemaker@tenspoonvineyard.com); Steve Earle; Greg Phillips
Subject: SB 261 letter

Draft letter to senators as requested by Andy. Please comment ASAP:

January 22, 2009

Dear Senators;

On Friday, January 30th, you will have the opportunity to discuss Senate Bill 261, regarding the safe and efficient operation of a municipal bus line. The Missoula Urban Transportation District has worked with Senator Wanzenried in the crafting of this bill.

To minimize the impact of bus stops on traffic, when possible, it has been the general practice of transit agencies to pull out of traffic flow, allowing cars to move freely past while passengers board and de-board the bus. However, as traffic volumes increase it becomes more difficult for transit buses to quickly merge into traffic and to continue along their route. A typical transit bus operator may pull into and out of 400 stops in an 8 hour shift. The delay caused by the inability to merge back into traffic and continue on the route causes two problems for transit agencies. The first is that it can cause buses to be late, especially at peak demand periods. When buses are late to the central transfer point, other buses must either wait to receive the delayed passengers for transfers, or go on, leaving the passengers behind to wait for the next bus, and more than likely late for work. The second issue is efficiency. Because we are aware that this delay will occur, we are forced to cover a smaller area to accommodate the delay time.

To mitigate bus delays and maintain safety, several states have enacted laws to provide priority to public transit buses when leaving a bus stop. Similar laws exist in many other states, for example Florida, Minnesota, Washington State and California.

The key to successful implementation of Yield to Bus laws rests with the transit agency. An outreach and education campaign is required to get the word out that cars should yield right of way to a bus with its turn signal on to reenter traffic.

Similar education and outreach efforts can be seen in the highway departments "Give 'Em a Brake" campaign, through which drivers were trained to slow down through construction zones to protect the safety of workers. Signage on buses, advertisements, and public service announcements would be use to indicate the need to allow buses back into traffic.

Senate Bill 261 is a cost effective way to maximize the efficiency of transit systems in Montana. There is no cost to the general fund, and minimal costs incurred by the transit agency and local jurisdiction which choose to enact a Yield to Bus ordinance locally. It does not create a mandatory requirement for all transit agencies in Montana, but creates a tool that can be enacted at the local level as needed by the Council or Commission.

We encourage you support SB 261. Please contact Mountain Line staff Steve Earle, General Manager or Stephanie Millar, Transit Planner with any questions.