

MINUTES
SENATE TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE

DATE: Tuesday, February 24, 2026

TIME: 1:30 P.M.

PLACE: Room WW53

MEMBERS PRESENT: Chairman Okuniewicz, Vice Chairman Keyser, Senators Burtenshaw, Hart, Adams, Galloway, Kohl, Rabe, and Semmelroth

ABSENT/ EXCUSED: None

NOTE: The sign-in sheet, testimonies and other related materials will be retained with the minutes in the committee's office until the end of the session and will then be located on file with the minutes in the Legislative Services Library.

CONVENED: **Chairman Okuniewicz** called the meeting of the Senate Transportation Committee (Committee) to order at 1:30 p.m.

MINUTES APPROVAL: **Senator Galloway** moved to approve the Minutes of February 12, 2026. **Senator Kohl** seconded the motion. The motion passed by **voice vote**.

MINUTES APPROVAL: **Senator Semmelroth** moved to approve the Minutes of February 17, 2026. **Senator Kohl** seconded the motion. The motion passed by **voice vote**.

H 576 **MOTOR VEHICLES - Amends existing law to establish an Idaho residency requirement to receive funds from Idaho Consumer Asset Recovery Fund (ICAR). Representative Joe Palmer** stated that the ICAR Fund had been created by the Dealer Advisory Board to help regulate its own industry and improve consumer protection. The fund had been established around 2010 in response to concerns about the industry's reputation, with the goal of increasing accountability and ensuring customers were treated fairly. Under the program, if a licensed dealer engaged in misconduct, they went through the court process, and a judgment was awarded against them, affected individuals could seek compensation from the ICAR Fund to recover their losses. The legislation applied specifically to Idaho residents, it was developed by Idaho companies, and continued to be regulated within the state.

MOTION: **Senator Burtenshaw** moved to send **H 576** to the floor with a **do pass** recommendation. **Senator Keyser** seconded the motion. The motion carried by **voice vote**.

H 577 **TRANSPORTATION - Amends existing law to provide that license plates do not automatically expire after 10 years and may continue to be used while still legible. Representative Michael Veile** stated that the legislation eliminated the requirement that license plates be replaced every 10 years. Previously, State law had required vehicle owners to obtain a new license plate after a decade, regardless of its condition. This legislation removed that mandate and instead required a replacement only if the license plate becomes unreadable.

DISCUSSION: **Senator Rabe** asked whether concerns had been raised regarding law enforcement and how this change might affect them. Specifically, what was declared "unreadable". At what point had a license plate been considered too difficult to read, and had that created challenges or inconsistencies for law enforcement officers. **Rep. Veile** responded that he had not spoken with the overall governing body of law enforcement but had consulted with local law enforcement, including a sheriff and state officials. He stated that they had not expressed significant concerns about the change. He explained that the bill required license plates to remain legible and readable, a standard that was already consistent with existing law under Idaho Code § 49-428(2), which required plates to be clearly legible. He noted that this standard had already been established in statute and precedent. While the language might not have been highly explicit, he said it provided law enforcement with sufficient discretion and flexibility in determining when a plate was no longer readable.

Senator Hart stated that license plates were required to be replaced every 10 years because the reflective coating on the plates was believed to assist law enforcement in using radar or related technology. He asked whether that concern was still relevant today. Specifically, was current law enforcement technology still dependent on the reflective quality of license plates, or had advancements in technology made the issue obsolete. **Representative Veile** explained that State police had been asked whether they used any type of video equipment to automatically read license plates, such as automated license plate readers. It was acknowledged that some counties did use that technology.

MOTION: **Vice Chairman Keyser** moved to send **H 577** to the floor with a **do pass** recommendation. **Senator Burtenshaw** seconded the motion. The motion carried by **voice vote**. **Senator Hart** requested to be recorded on record as voting Nay.

S 1224 **TRANSPORTATION - Adds to existing law to establish provisions regarding slow moving vehicles.** **Senator Burtenshaw** presented **S 1224**, which amended Idaho Code §§ 49-619 and 49-639 regarding slow-moving vehicles obstructing traffic. The bill created an exception for farm tractors, construction equipment, and logging equipment, allowing operators to remain on the roadway when no safe or size-appropriate turnout was available. He explained that modern agricultural equipment was extremely large, heavy, and often unable to safely exit the highway due to steep shoulders, narrow bridges, overpasses, reflectors, utility boxes, or limited access points.

Senator Burens Shaw used photos and examples, he demonstrated how combines, tractors, planters, and tillage equipment could span much of the roadway and make pulling off both difficult and dangerous. In many cases, attempting to leave the road posed greater risks than remaining partially on it. **Senator Bertenshaw** emphasized that operators typically traveled at speeds of about 25 miles per hour, used flashers and mirrors, and attempted to move over as far as safely possible. He shared tragic examples of fatal rear-end collisions involving farm equipment to illustrate the safety concerns (Attachment 1).

He stated that the purpose of **S 1224** was to provide equipment operators with reasonable discretion to determine when it was safe to temporarily exit the highway, rather than requiring them to pull off when no safe option existed. The measure aimed to prevent unnecessary citations and improve safety. He also noted a proposed amendment to clarify language regarding safe and reasonable designated turnouts and requested that the bill be sent to the 14th Order for amendment before moving forward.

TESTIMONY: **Dexton Lake** representing the Idaho Farm Bureau Federation (IFBF), testified that the organization had brought the concern to Senator Burtenshaw earlier in the year. He stated that while the issue might have seemed like common sense, some farm equipment operators had been pulled over when traffic accumulated behind them. He explained that the bill would give operators the ability to defend themselves in situations where no safe or size-appropriate turnout existed. He expressed support for the proposed amendments and appreciation for law enforcement's role in addressing the issue. He noted that both agriculture and law enforcement performed critical work and described the legislation as a reasonable compromise and practical solution to a recurring problem in an increasingly urbanized Idaho.

Peyton Nunes representing Idaho Chiefs of Police Association (ICOPA) testified in support of sending **S 1224** to the amending order to incorporate the proposed changes. She explained that by removing the language of "reasonable judgment," the bill provided a clearer framework for law enforcement while still allowing officers to exercise discretion when handling these situations. She added that the change would make the law easier to enforce and encouraged the Committee to advance the bill to the 14th Order.

Douglas Jones testified as a retired farmer from the Magic Valley. He described his experience operating large agricultural equipment, including combines and tillage machinery, while performing custom farm work across the region. He explained that the Snake River Canyon between Burley and Buell posed significant challenges, as there were only five crossings in a 60-mile stretch. He noted that bridges and major roads, such as the Prime Bridge and Poll Line Road near Twin Falls, made it nearly impossible for large equipment to pull off safely without obstructing traffic for extended distances. He emphasized that rapid population growth in Idaho meant many drivers were unfamiliar with the size and slow speed of farm machinery, increasing the risk of accidents.

Mr. Jones stated that the proposed changes in **S 1224** would benefit both the agricultural and construction communities by allowing operators greater discretion when no safe pull-off existed, while also educating the public about the challenges of moving large equipment.

MOTION: **Senator Adams** moved to send **H 1224** to the 14th Order of Business for possible amendment. **Senator Kohl** seconded the motion. The motion carried by **voice vote**.

S 1325 **MOTOR VEHICLES - Amends and adds to existing law to establish a white and black license plate.** **Senator Den Hartog** presented **S 1325**, which proposed a new specialty license plate to benefit the Idaho State Police (ISP). The plate would be plain white with black lettering, featuring only "Idaho" at the top and no additional markings. The bill was developed after discussions with the Idaho Transportation Department (ITD) and ISP, in response to the department's need for funding, particularly for salaries. The proceeds from the sale of the plate would go exclusively to the Idaho State Police Law Enforcement Fund, which could only be used for salaries. The plate was modeled on the popular black-and-white specialty plate, which had generated millions in revenue for another state program. Each \$70 plate would allocate \$5 to ITD and the remainder to the ISP. **Senator Den Hartog** noted that while the plate would not cover all funding needs, it could provide a meaningful contribution to ISP salaries.

NOTED: **Senator Rabe** acknowledged that ISP pay was a real issue and wanted to be on the record that ISP salaries were not keeping pace with other law enforcement positions, making recruitment and retention difficult, and emphasized the need to continue addressing the matter.

Senator Adams commented that he intended to remain consistent with his long-standing "no specialty plate" position.

MOTION: **Senator Burtenshaw** moved to send **S 1325** to the floor with a **do pass** recommendation. **Senator Rabe** seconded the motion. The motion carried by **voice vote**. **Senator Adams** requested to be recorded as voting Nay.

ADJOURNED: There being no further business at this time, **Chairman Okuniewicz** adjourned the meeting at 2:16 p.m.

Senator Okuniewicz
Chair

Melissa Price
Secretary