

MINUTES
SENATE TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE

DATE: Thursday, March 05, 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.

H 629 **TRANSPORTATION - Amends existing law to provide for an electronic format of registration for vehicles. Representative Joe Palmer** explained that **H 629** was a short bill. He noted that all the changes appeared on page six, where there was one strikeout and the addition of the word "forwards." He said the wording required a little thought but was ultimately simple. The bill gave people the option, when registering their car online with the Idaho Transportation Department (ITD), to choose not to receive a paper registration by mail. Instead, they could print their own copy, or keep it on their phone, or still request a paper copy be mailed to them. The bill simply opened those options to users. **Representative Palmer** added that, based on ITD estimates of how many people might choose the digital option, the change could save about \$800,000 annually. Those savings would remain with ITD and be moved into the distribution fund the department used.

DISCUSSION: **Senator Hart** asked if the registration was kept on a phone, there might be times when the registration would not be with the vehicle. **Representative Palmer** responded that it could happen if a paper copy was not kept in the vehicle. He acknowledged that the situation was possible but suggested that people could avoid it by keeping a printed copy in the vehicle. **Senator Hart** inquired if there had been any communications with law enforcement about the bill. **Representative Palmer** responded that feedback from law enforcement had been mixed. He said some were in support of the bill, while one group within the Sheriff's Association opposed it. He stated he was unsure of their reasoning but believed that if someone chose to receive the registration electronically, they could still print a copy, and that printed version would satisfy the requirement to have the registration in the vehicle.

Chairman Okuniewicz reiterated that if a person chose to receive their registration electronically they could print a copy, which would satisfy the requirement to have the registration in the vehicle.

TESTIMONY: **Deputy Zach Hessing**, Idaho Sheriffs Association (ISA), testified on behalf of the Ada County Sheriff's Office and the ISA stating that 44 sheriffs in Idaho opposed the bill for several reasons. He explained that not requiring a paper copy of the vehicle registration in the car would make it more difficult for law enforcement officers to obtain the information they needed during traffic stops, such as details required for citations and confirmation of vehicle ownership. Although officers could often run license plates using internet technology, he noted that many rural areas of Idaho lacked reliable internet connectivity, which could prevent officers from accessing that information.

Deputy Hessing stated that law enforcement systems such as Computer-Aided Dispatch (CAD) systems and mobile data terminals in patrol vehicles sometimes went down, and the network itself could fail. In those cases, officers relied on the paper registration as a dependable source of information. He added that driver's were accustomed to handing officers their drivers license and registration during a stop. While insurance cards were sometimes shown on phones, he said insurance was different because officers only verified its validity and did not rely on it for citation information or ownership details. He further stated that officers preferred not to handle or review driver's phones at the window, both for practical reasons and for officer safety. He also noted that officers would not want to take photos of registration information from a phone screen during a stop. For these reasons, he concluded that the ISA opposed the bill.

DISCUSSION: **Chairman Okuniewicz** asked if a drivers' phone did not have coverage, or if the driver could not access their electronic copy of the registration, whether the driver would be held liable. He inquired if it would be the drivers responsibility to have either a paper copy or an accessible electronic copy. He questioned whether situations such as a phone not working, being forgotten, or being lost, whether it would ultimately be the drivers' responsibility. **Deputy Hessing** stated that if the drivers' phone was not working and they did not have a paper copy, they would be in violation of the statute.

Senator Kohl asked what typically happened during a routine traffic stop. He asked whether officers generally took the vehicle registration back to the patrol car to obtain the necessary information. **Deputy Hessing** explained that during a typical traffic stop, officers approached the vehicle and requested the drivers license, registration, and proof of insurance. He said officers took the paper registration back to the patrol car and compared the information on the document with what appeared in the computer system, if the computer was functioning. He added that officers did not want to take driver's phones back to the patrol car to access registration information because the phones are personal property and doing so could create additional issues.

Senator Adams noted, while looking at page six where the strike through occurred, that commercial vehicles registered under several different sections were already exempt from carrying registrations. He asked Deputy Hessing to explain how that process worked and whether an electronic version was used for those vehicles. **Deputy Hessing** responded that he was unsure, noting that it had been a while since he had been on the street, particularly regarding commercial vehicles. He said he had dealt with school buses in traffic accidents, which still had paper registrations, but he was not certain about commercial trucks and could not provide a definitive answer.

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Representative Palmer explained that officers could use their radios to call in information if computers were not working, though he acknowledged that system failures could occur. He noted that proof of insurance was already accessible on most drivers' phones and that downloading registration to a phone did not require a live internet connection. He added that if a driver could not provide registration at the time of a stop, officers would typically issue a citation, which the driver could later show once the information was available. **Representative Palmer** emphasized that this system already existed for commercial trucks, which used electronic registration, and that the bill would simply extend the option to passenger vehicles. He concluded that if a driver preferred not to use their phone, they could always print a copy of the registration, ensuring compliance.

DISCUSSION: **Senator Adams** asked why the process had been different for commercial vehicles in the first place, noting that if electronic registrations had already been allowed for commercial vehicles, this bill would have extended it to other vehicles. He asked if **Representative Palmer** had any insight on the original difference. **Representative Palmer** responded that he was not sure if the difference for commercial vehicles had simply been overlooked when the rules were originally established. He explained that when he consulted with ITD about ways to save money and streamline processes, ITD noted that electronic registration already worked for trucks and that the same system could be applied to passenger vehicles.

Senator Rabe asked for clarification about how vehicle owners would be notified if their registration expired. **Representative Palmer** explained that currently, vehicle owners received a small notice or card. He stated that under this legislation, that process would not change.

MOTION: **Vice Chairman Keyser** moved to send **H 629** to the floor with a **do pass** recommendation. **Senator Adams** seconded the motion.

DISCUSSION: **Vice Chairman Keyser** stated the system was utilized as an additional tool and did not change the requirement to first obtain proof of registration. A copy of the registration and all related information was available through department computers, in patrol vehicles, and via radio when necessary. Commercial drivers had already been using this option as a secondary method. He said it did not create any unnecessary risk to officer safety. Traffic stops already carried inherent risk, and this measure simply provided officers with an additional tool to access required information.

Senator Hart stated he planned to vote against the bill for several reasons. He expressed concern that some people might not realize that there could be times when they would have to hand their phone to an officer, who would take it into the patrol vehicle. He noted that most people keep extensive personal information on their phones, and he believed neither drivers nor officers would feel comfortable with that, fearing potential accusations of tampering or data misuse.

Senator Rabe echoed Senator Harts' concerns about the possibility of an officer taking a driver's phone, noting potential Fourth Amendment and constitutional issues. She raised questions about how such situations would work in practice, including scenarios like a personal text appearing on the phone, and highlighted numerous hypothetical legal challenges for citizens. For these reasons, she stated that she would vote no on the bill.

Chairman Okuniewicz stated he was considering the potential savings that could result from the ITD no longer needing to print and mail vehicle registrations, noting that a significant amount of money could potentially be saved. He questioned

whether the bill could allow individuals to receive their registration electronically while still requiring them to print a copy and keep it in the vehicle, suggesting that such an approach might address many of the concerns raised. He indicated he was unsure whether this approach aligned with the sponsors' intentions but believed it warranted further discussion. **Chairman Okuniewicz** further noted that implementing such a change might require sending the bill to the 14th Order for amendment. He also remarked that he personally preferred receiving documents online immediately and printing them himself, as he did with proof of insurance, to keep in his vehicle. He concluded that, even with minimal changes, the bill could still achieve most of its intended financial benefits.

VOICE VOTE: The motion to send **H 629** to the floor with a **do pass** recommendation failed by **voice vote**.

ADJOURNED: There being no further business at this time **Chairman Okuniewicz** adjourned the meeting at 1:52 p.m.

Senator Okuniewicz
Chair

Melissa Price
Secretary