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Committee On Transportation
Public Hearing
February 24, 2009

Testimony on HB 6078, An Act Concerning Neighborhood Electric Vehicles

Senators Toni Boucher, Donald DeFronzo; Representatives Tony Guerrero, David Scribner; and Members of the Transportation Committee

I want to thank the committee for raising HB 6078.

Legalizing Neighborhood Electric Cars is not a new issue. Forty states currently have laws allowing low speed vehicles to be operated on some roads. It is my hope that Connecticut will join these states in permitting these cost efficient, energy friendly vehicles to be operated with limited use.

The main advantages of neighborhood electric vehicles compared to regular passenger cars are that they are convenient to use, relatively inexpensive to operate, cost less to purchase, and, if electrically powered, do not produce the pollutants associated with vehicles powered by internal combustion engines.

Neighborhood electric vehicles are typically powered by electric batteries and are recharged by plugging them into a standard electrical outlet. The typical recharge period is six to eight hours according to some manufacturers. This feature makes them relatively cheap to operate when compared to gasoline-powered vehicles because they are drawing their power from the commercial power grid.

According to statistics compiled by the federal Energy Information Administration, the average retail price of electricity in Connecticut for residential users in April 2008 was 19.4 cents per kilowatt hour. For purposes of this illustration we will assume a cost per gallon of gasoline to be \$ 3.50. According to its website, Global Electric Motorcars (GEM)—a well known manufacturer of neighborhood electric vehicles—asserts that the comparative annual costs of “fuel” for its vehicles for usage of 125 miles per week would be \$ 252 compared to \$ 843 for a gasoline-powered compact vehicle getting 27 miles per gallon based on these rates.

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Although there is variation among manufacturers and models, neighborhood electric vehicles typically cost less to purchase new than the standard types of motor vehicles. For example, according to its website, prices for the various models made by Global Electric Motorcars range from \$ 6,795 for its basic two-passenger model to \$ 17,495 for its six-passenger "special edition" model. Its four-passenger basic model starts at \$ 9,695.

The General Assembly considered low speed vehicle legislation in 2005. The bill, SB 1288, received a public hearing from the Transportation Committee on March 14, 2005 and was favorably reported by the committee on March 21. The Senate adopted the bill on May 25, 2005 and sent it to the House, but the House did not take it up.

SB 1288 authorized operation of neighborhood electric vehicles by someone who owns, leases, or has a contractual right to use it (1) on premises over which he or his employer has control or possessory interest, or on which he or his employer has a contractual right to operate it or (2) on highways that have established speed limits of up to 30 miles per hour that are on, or contiguous to, such premises. But the bill authorized a municipality's local traffic authority to limit or prohibit operation on any highway under its jurisdiction.

A neighborhood electric vehicle was defined as a four-wheeled, self-propelled, electrically-powered motor vehicle designed for carrying passengers with an attainable speed of at least 20 but not more than 25 miles per hour on a paved level surface. Neighborhood electric vehicles had to meet standards established for low-speed vehicles by federal regulation as well as various state requirements for mandatory equipment.

In addition, the bill authorized the motor vehicle commissioner to issue registrations and certificates of title for these vehicles, subjected them to mandatory financial responsibility requirements applicable to other types of passenger motor vehicles, and required the driver to have a valid driver's license or learner's permit. It required a registration applicant to pay a fee of \$ 18.

SB 1288 required neighborhood electric vehicles to comply with the various equipment requirements mandated by state law (CGS § 14-80 through 14-106c), to the extent they were consistent with the federal low speed vehicle standards. These laws cover, among other things, exhaust systems; ball joints and tie rod ends; brakes; hydraulic brake fluid; head and tail lamps; reflectors; stop lamps; light colors; sufficiency of head and rear lights; auxiliary lights; turn signals; fender, backup, and identification lamps; light intensity; tires; mirrors; windshields; tinted windows; use of safety glass; seat belts; fenders; video displays; air conditioning equipment; and tamper-resistant odometers.

The bill required the commissioner to issue certificates of title for neighborhood electric vehicles that have been issued a manufacturer's or importer's certificate of origin and a vehicle identification number. It also subjected them to the other statutory requirements for titled motor vehicles, including various fees such as the \$ 25 title application fee and the fees for noting and filing a security interest and searching title records.

In the Town of Ridgefield, we have a resident who owns and uses a Neighborhood Electric Vehicle (he can do so legally because his property straddles CT and NY and it is registered in NY State). Needless to say, it draws a lot of attention. I have had many, many constituents inquire about it and suggest that if they were legal, they would also be interested in purchasing and using a similar vehicle.

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At my request, in 2008 the Office of Legislative Research completed two reports related to Neighborhood Vehicles.

2008-R-0479 Neighborhood Electric Vehicles

2008-R-0432 Low Speed Electric Vehicles

There is considerable amount of information contained in these reports that you might find helpful.

Thank you for your consideration of the bill.