

Connecticut Law Governing Golf Cart Use on Roads

By: George Miles, Associate Attorney
October 27, 2020 | 2020-R-0259

Issue

Summarize the law in Connecticut concerning the use of golf carts on roads.

Summary

The Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) and the state's courts have generally concluded that golf carts are unsuitable for public roadway use. For this reason, the department does not register these vehicles. Consequently, it is generally illegal to use golf carts on public roads ([CGS § 14-12\(a\)](#)), as amended by [PA 19-165](#)).

There is an exception, however, that allows local traffic authorities (LTAs) to permit their use subject to certain conditions. Specifically, the:

1. permitted use must be on a road with a posted speed limit of 25 miles per hour or less that is under an authority's jurisdiction and limited to daylight hours only,
2. golf carts must be equipped with an operable horn that satisfies state legal requirements and a flag that assists drivers of other vehicles in seeing the cart, and
3. golf cart operators must carry a valid driver's license ([CGS § 14-300g\(a\)](#)).

The East Lyme LTA, for example, has taken advantage of this statutory authorization (see its [Code of Ordinances Chapter 74](#)). Depending how a municipality is organized, its LTA may be the board of police commissioners, city or town manager, police chief or superintendent, board of selectmen, or

any legally elected or appointed official or board ([CGS § 14-297\(6\)](#)). A directory of the LTAs for each municipality is posted online [here](#).

Relatedly, the DMV commissioner may establish, by regulation, insurance requirements that apply to golf cart use authorized by LTAs ([CGS § 14-300g\(b\)](#)). At present, the department has not exercised this authority.

If a person is caught illegally operating a golf cart (i.e., violating [CGS § 14-12\(a\)](#), as amended by [PA 19-165](#)) or violating the requirements associated with golf cart use authorized by LTAs (i.e., [CGS § 14-300g](#)), then he or she will currently receive a \$117 ticket in both instances (see the Superior Court's [Schedule of Fines](#) dated October 1, 2019).

General Prohibition

By law, it is an infraction for anyone to operate an “unregistered motor vehicle” on a public road. An “unregistered motor vehicle” includes any vehicle that is not eligible for registration due to the absence of necessary equipment or other characteristics of the vehicle that make it unsuitable for public roadway use, unless its use is expressly permitted by certain state laws ([CGS § 14-12\(a\)](#), as amended by [PA 19-165](#)). Similarly, a separate law excludes vehicles unsuitable for public roadway use from a widely applicable statutory definition of “motor vehicle” ([CGS § 14-1\(59\)](#), as amended by [PA 19-162](#)).

As summarized in a 1998 Superior Court decision, DMV's Chief of Legal Services submitted an affidavit stating that “a golf cart is not registerable as a motor vehicle in the State of Connecticut, as a golf cart is not meant for on-the-road operation.” Among other things, according to the court, the affidavit listed 12 pieces of equipment that are absent from golf carts but required by law for registered motor vehicles. Based on this affidavit and other facts of the case, the judge concluded that the golf cart at issue was not a “motor vehicle” under [CGS § 14-1](#) because it was “not suitable for operation on the highway because it [was] not designed for such use.” The state's Appellate and Supreme Courts later affirmed this conclusion ([East v. Labbe](#), 46 Conn. Supp. 24 (Super. Ct. 1998), aff'd, 54 Conn. App. 479 (1999), aff'd, 252 Conn. 359 (2000)).

Relatedly, Judge Sullivan, in the Superior Court decision in [East v. Labbe](#), noted that (1) golf carts operated on public roads solely for crossing from one part of a golf course to another and (2) golf-cart-type vehicles operated by state employees on roads on the grounds of state institutions are, among other vehicles, expressly excluded from the [CGS § 14-1](#) definition of “motor vehicle.” He argued that the phrasing of the definition indicated that those specific golf carts were also unsuitable for general public roadway use.

More recently, in 2009, the DMV Commissioner submitted written testimony concerning two golf cart related bills in which he wrote:

Current statute, namely § 14-12(f), directs the Commissioner to refuse registration “for a motor vehicle or a class of motor vehicles if he determined that the characteristics of the motor vehicle or class of motor vehicles make it unsafe for highway operation.” Further, the statute prohibits the Commissioner from registering any motor vehicle if he knows that the motor vehicle’s equipment fails to comply with the provisions of Chapter 246 of the General Statutes.

As stated by the Connecticut Superior Court in its decision in East v. Labbe, 46 Conn. Supp. 24 (1998) (affirmed by both the Appellate Court and the Supreme Court), a golf cart is not eligible for registration as a motor vehicle. This is because it lacks numerous items of equipment that are required by various sections of Chapter 246. A golf cart also is unable to sustain the minimum speed required for an electric-powered, so-called “high mileage” motor vehicle, in accordance with § 14-303b-2 of the Regulations of Connecticut State Agencies. While our legislature has clearly stated, over the years, the basic purposes and standards for the issuance of registrations, it has also, from time-to-time, made certain exceptions, to permit certain vehicles that are not eligible for registration as a motor vehicle to be operated on public highways, for limited purposes and/or to a limited extent ([2009 DMV Commissioner Testimony](#)).

At present, DMV continues to not register golf carts (see this [DMV webpage](#)).

GM:kc