

Publication:The Dominion Post;**Date:**Feb 15, 2010;**Section:**Front Page;**Page Number:**1

Lawmakers tackle taxis, trooper levels

Local legislators sponsor several bills this session

BY DAVID BEARD The Dominion Post

Local lawmakers have signed onto bills to give cities control over taxis, trash haulers and tow trucks; license mini trucks; and boost the number of state troopers.

Lawmakers seek local control for taxis, trash and towing

Monongalia County Delegates Charlene Marshall, Bob Beach, Barbara Evans Fleischauer and Alex Shook co-sponsored a bill to give Class I and Class II cities — Morgantown is a Class I — authority to regulate taxi, towing and trash pickup companies.

Fleischauer said the bill — HB 4385 — was introduced at Morgantown City Council's request.

City manager Dan Boroff said the state Public Service Commission regulates all three businesses, but cities deal with them daily and have a better grip on local needs and issues.

So cities are better positioned to regulate them, he said.

Boroff said there are no controversies at the moment. Republic Services — formerly Allied Waste, the city's trash hauler — works regularly with the city to handle issues.

And while there have been calls from some to allow a second taxi service in town, he said Yellow Cab, the city's only taxi service, upgraded its service — adding vehicles and downtown taxi stands.

The primary purpose of the bill, he said, is local control.

It is with the House Political Subdivisions Committee. Delegates Tim Manchin, D-Marion, and Beach are chairman and vice chairman, respectively.

Lawmakers may allow

mini trucks on roads

Mini trucks are not approved for highway use in West Virginia. They're produced by a number of Japanese automakers and imported as utility vehicles.

There are several dealers in the state, including Mountaineer Mini Trucks in Arthurdale, Preston County. Mountaineer has about 25 used trucks on its lot, a company spokesman said.

Mini trucks are relatively fuel efficient, with 2-, 3-, or 4-cylinder engines that average 40 mpg, according to mini truck information. They're about 10 feet long, 5 feet high and 4 feet wide, with a small cab and 6-foot rear bed. They weigh about 1,800 pounds.

They cost from \$5,000 to \$8,500, said the Mountaineer spokesman, and are used for farming, hunting, golf courses, off road and more.

"They're pretty versatile utility trucks," said Delegate Larry Williams, who co-sponsored HB 4402 along with Delegates Bob Beach, D-Monongalia, and Stan Shaver, D-Preston. "I believe they have their place," he said.

Sens. Bob Williams, D-Taylor, and Dave Sypolt, R-Preston, co-sponsored an identical Senate version, SB 421.

Sen. Williams said a Webster County dealer asked him about licensing the trucks because of confusion about where they can travel.

For example, several people said, certain farm vehicles can travel 25 miles each way on a road to go to a feed store or repair shop. Sen. Williams cited a Mon County rail-trail rider who doesn't know if he can drive the truck home after he leaves the trail.

The legislators consulted with the Division of Motor Vehicles and other sources to construct the bill.

The bill:

Creates a new mini truck vehicle category, lists rules for dealers and required safety features;

Requires them to be licensed, registered and inspected and sets fees;

Allows them on primary and secondary roads, at speeds up to 55 mph, but restricts them from interstates.

The House bill is in the roads Committee, the Senate bill is in Judiciary.

Bill would put 800

state troopers on patrol

Sen. Williams is also a cosponsor of SB 386 — to raise the number of state troopers to 800 by 2014 — along with Sens. Roman Prezioso, D-Marion, Jeff Kessler, D-Marshall, and seven others.

State Police Sgt. M.T. Baylous said there are 668 state police, including current cadets; 18 are on active military duty, leaving 650 available.

Williams said the goal is to increase the number of troopers on road patrol, especially in rural counties — 22 detachments have only three to five troopers available for 24-hour duty.

It's a safety issue for residents and troopers, he said — backup can often be 30 to 45 minutes away.

To reach the 800-mark, he said, the State Police Academy would add a second 31-cadet class each year through 2014.

The bill is in the Finance Committee, Williams said, and a fiscal note with the financial impact is in the works.

Baylous acknowledged that the state has budget challenges, but if the Legislature finds the funds, it would be good.

"Let them make that determination," he said.

The Judiciary Committee passed a committee substitute to the Finance Committee.

