

STATE OF NEW YORK

4089

2019-2020 Regular Sessions

IN SENATE

February 27, 2019

Introduced by Sen. THOMAS -- read twice and ordered printed, and when printed to be committed to the Committee on Transportation

AN ACT to amend the vehicle and traffic law and the public officers law, in relation to authorizing political subdivisions to establish demonstration programs, implementing railroad grade crossing monitoring systems by means of photo devices; and providing for the repeal of such provisions upon expiration thereof

The People of the State of New York, represented in Senate and Assembly, do enact as follows:

1 Section 1. Section 135-a of the vehicle and traffic law, as added by
2 chapter 501 of the laws of 2016, is amended to read as follows:

3 § 135-a. Railroad grade crossing. A location where [~~a public highway~~
4 ~~or private road, including associated sidewalks, crosses one or more~~]
5 railroad tracks [~~at grade~~] intersect a public or private highway, road-
6 way or sidewalk.

7 § 2. The vehicle and traffic law is amended by adding a new section
8 1170-a to read as follows:

9 § 1170-a. Owner liability for failure of operator to obey signal
10 indicating approach of train. (a) 1. Notwithstanding any other
11 provision of law, any political subdivision is hereby authorized and
12 empowered to adopt and amend a local law, ordinance or resolution estab-
13 lishing a demonstration program imposing monetary liability on the owner
14 of a vehicle for failure of an operator thereof to comply with section
15 eleven hundred seventy of this article. Such demonstration program shall
16 empower a political subdivision to install and operate railroad grade
17 crossing photo violation-monitoring devices at any railroad sign or
18 signal within its jurisdiction. The cost of such photo violation-moni-
19 toring devices may be borne by the political subdivision, a commuter
20 railroad operating within the political subdivision, or a combination of
21 both such political subdivision and commuter railroad pursuant to a
22 memorandum of understanding.

EXPLANATION--Matter in italics (underscored) is new; matter in brackets
[~~-~~] is old law to be omitted.

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1 2. Such demonstration program shall utilize necessary technologies to
2 ensure, to the extent practicable, that photographs produced by such
3 railroad grade crossing photo violation-monitoring systems shall not
4 include images that identify the driver, the passengers or the contents
5 of the vehicle. Provided, however, that no notice of liability issued
6 pursuant to this section shall be dismissed solely because a photograph
7 or photographs allow for the identification of the contents of a vehi-
8 cle, provided that such political subdivision has made a reasonable
9 effort to comply with the provisions of this paragraph.

10 (b) Within the jurisdiction of any such political subdivision which
11 has adopted a local law, ordinance or resolution pursuant to subdivision
12 (a) of this section, the owner of a vehicle shall be liable for a penal-
13 ty imposed pursuant to this section if such vehicle was used or operated
14 with the permission of the owner, express or implied, in violation of
15 section eleven hundred seventy of this article, and such violation is
16 evidenced by information obtained from a railroad grade crossing photo
17 violation-monitoring system; provided, however, that no owner of a vehi-
18 cle shall be liable for a penalty imposed pursuant to this section where
19 the operator of such vehicle has been convicted of the underlying
20 violation of section eleven hundred seventy of this article.

21 (c) For purposes of this section, the following terms shall have the
22 following meanings:

23 1. "Owner" shall have the meaning provided in article two-B of this
24 chapter.

25 2. "Railroad grade crossing photo violation-monitoring system" shall
26 mean a vehicle sensor installed to work in conjunction with a railroad
27 sign or signal which automatically produces two or more photographs, two
28 or more microphotographs, a videotape or other recorded images of each
29 vehicle at the time it is used or operated in violation of section elev-
30 en hundred seventy of this article.

31 3. "Political subdivision" shall mean a county, city, town or village
32 located within the metropolitan commuter transportation district, as
33 defined in section twelve hundred sixty-two of the public authorities
34 law.

35 4. "Commuter railroad" shall mean a railroad owned and operated by the
36 metropolitan transportation authority and located within the metropol-
37 itan commuter transportation district, as defined in section twelve
38 hundred sixty-two of the public authorities law.

39 (d) A certificate, sworn to or affirmed by a technician employed by
40 the political subdivision in which the charged violation occurred, or a
41 facsimile thereof, based upon inspection of photographs, microphoto-
42 graphs, videotape or other recorded images produced by a railroad grade
43 crossing photo violation-monitoring system, shall be prima facie
44 evidence of the facts contained therein. Any photographs, microphoto-
45 graphs, videotape or other recorded images evidencing such a violation
46 shall be available for inspection in any proceeding to adjudicate the
47 liability for such violation pursuant to a local law, ordinance or
48 resolution adopted pursuant to this section.

49 (e) An owner liable for a violation of section eleven hundred seventy
50 of this article pursuant to a local law, ordinance or resolution adopted
51 pursuant to this section shall be liable for monetary penalties in
52 accordance with a schedule of fines and penalties to be established in
53 such local law, ordinance or resolution. The liability of the owner
54 pursuant to this section shall not exceed one hundred dollars for each
55 violation; provided, however, that an adjudicating authority may provide
56 for an additional penalty of not in excess of twenty-five dollars for

1 each violation for the failure to respond to a notice of liability with-
2 in the prescribed period of time.

3 (f) An imposition of liability under a local law, ordinance or resol-
4 ution adopted pursuant to this section shall not be deemed a conviction
5 as an operator and shall not be made part of the operating record of the
6 person upon whom such liability is imposed nor shall it be used for
7 insurance purposes in the provision of motor vehicle insurance coverage.

8 (g) 1. A notice of liability shall be sent by first class mail to each
9 person alleged to be liable as an owner for a violation of section elev-
10 en hundred seventy of this article pursuant to this section. Personal
11 delivery on the owner shall not be required. A manual or automatic
12 record of mailing prepared in the ordinary course of business shall be
13 prima facie evidence of the facts contained therein.

14 2. A notice of liability shall contain the name and address of the
15 person alleged to be liable as an owner for a violation of section elev-
16 en hundred seventy of this article pursuant to this section, the regis-
17 tration number of the vehicle involved in such violation, the location
18 where such violation took place, the date and time of such violation and
19 the identification number of the camera which recorded the violation or
20 other document locator number.

21 3. The notice of liability shall contain information advising the
22 person charged of the manner and the time in which he or she may contest
23 the liability alleged in the notice. Such notice of liability shall also
24 contain a warning to advise the person charged that failure to contest
25 in the manner and time provided shall be deemed an admission of liabil-
26 ity and that a default judgment may be entered thereon.

27 4. The notice of liability shall be prepared and mailed by the poli-
28 tical subdivision, or by any other entity authorized by such political
29 subdivision to prepare and mail such notification of violation.

30 (h) Adjudication of the liability imposed upon owners by this section
31 shall be by the court having jurisdiction over traffic infractions,
32 except that if such political subdivision has established an administra-
33 tive tribunal to hear and determine complaints of traffic infractions
34 constituting parking, standing or stopping violations such political
35 subdivision may, by local law, authorize such adjudication by such
36 tribunal.

37 (i) If an owner receives a notice of liability pursuant to this
38 section for any time period during which the vehicle was reported to a
39 law enforcement agency as having been stolen, it shall be a valid
40 defense to an allegation of liability for a violation of section eleven
41 hundred seventy of this article pursuant to this section that the vehi-
42 cle had been reported to the police as stolen prior to the time the
43 violation occurred and had not been recovered by such time. For purposes
44 of asserting the defense provided by this subdivision it shall be suffi-
45 cient that a certified copy of a police report on the stolen vehicle be
46 sent by first class mail to the court having jurisdiction or parking
47 violations bureau.

48 (j) 1. In such political subdivision where the adjudication of liabil-
49 ity imposed upon owners pursuant to this section is by a court having
50 jurisdiction, an owner who is a lessor of a vehicle to which a notice of
51 liability was issued pursuant to subdivision (g) of this section shall
52 not be liable for the violation of section eleven hundred seventy of
53 this article, provided that he or she sends to the court having juris-
54 isdiction a copy of the rental, lease or other such contract document
55 covering such vehicle on the date of the violation, with the name and
56 address of the lessee clearly legible, within thirty-seven days after

1 receiving notice from the court of the date and time of such violation,
2 together with the other information contained in the original notice of
3 liability. Failure to send such information within such thirty-seven
4 day time period shall render the owner liable for the penalty prescribed
5 by this section. Where the lessor complies with the provisions of this
6 paragraph, the lessee of such vehicle on the date of such violation
7 shall be deemed to be the owner of such vehicle for purposes of this
8 section, shall be subject to liability for the violation of section
9 eleven hundred seventy of this article pursuant to this section and
10 shall be sent a notice of liability pursuant to subdivision (g) of this
11 section.

12 2. (I) In such political subdivision which has authorized the adjudi-
13 cation of liability imposed upon owners by this section by a parking
14 violations bureau, an owner who is a lessor of a vehicle to which a
15 notice of liability was issued pursuant to subdivision (g) of this
16 section shall not be liable for the violation of section eleven hundred
17 seventy of this article, provided that:

18 (A) prior to the violation, the lessor has filed with the bureau in
19 accordance with the provisions of section two hundred thirty-nine of
20 this chapter; and

21 (B) within thirty-seven days after receiving notice from the bureau of
22 the date and time of a liability, together with the other information
23 contained in the original notice of liability, the lessor submits to the
24 bureau the correct name and address of the lessee of the vehicle identi-
25 fied in the notice of liability at the time of such violation, together
26 with such other additional information contained in the rental, lease or
27 other contract document, as may be reasonably required by the bureau
28 pursuant to regulations that may be promulgated for such purpose.

29 (II) Failure to comply with clause (B) of subparagraph (I) of this
30 paragraph shall render the owner liable for the penalty prescribed in
31 this section.

32 (III) Where the lessor complies with the provisions of this paragraph,
33 the lessee of such vehicle on the date of such violation shall be deemed
34 to be the owner of such vehicle for purposes of this section, shall be
35 subject to liability for such violation pursuant to this section and
36 shall be sent a notice of liability pursuant to subdivision (g) of this
37 section.

38 (k) 1. If the owner liable for a violation of section eleven hundred
39 seventy of this article pursuant to this section was not the operator of
40 the vehicle at the time of the violation, the owner may maintain an
41 action for indemnification against the operator.

42 2. Notwithstanding any other provision of this section, no owner of a
43 vehicle shall be subject to a monetary fine imposed pursuant to this
44 section if the operator of such vehicle was operating such vehicle with-
45 out the consent of the owner at the time such operator failed to obey a
46 railroad sign or signal indicating the approach of a train. For
47 purposes of this subdivision there shall be a presumption that the oper-
48 ator of such vehicle was operating such vehicle with the consent of the
49 owner at the time such operator failed to obey a railroad sign or signal
50 indicating the approach of a train.

51 (l) Nothing in this section shall be construed to limit the liability
52 of an operator of a vehicle for any violation of section eleven hundred
53 seventy of this article.

54 (m) In any such political subdivision which adopts a demonstration
55 program pursuant to subdivision (a) of this section, such political
56 subdivision shall submit an annual report on the results of the use of a

1 railroad grade crossing photo violation-monitoring system to the gover-
2 nor, the temporary president of the senate and the speaker of the assem-
3 bly on or before June first, two thousand twenty and on the same date in
4 each succeeding year in which the demonstration program is operable.
5 Such report shall include, but not be limited to:

6 1. a description of the locations where railroad grade crossing photo
7 violation-monitoring systems were used;

8 2. the aggregate number, type and severity of accidents reported at
9 intersections where a railroad grade crossing photo violation-monitoring
10 system is used for the year preceding the installation of such system,
11 to the extent the information is maintained by the department;

12 3. the aggregate number, type and severity of accidents reported at
13 intersections where a railroad grade crossing photo violation-monitoring
14 system is used, to the extent the information is maintained by the
15 department;

16 4. the number of violations recorded at each intersection where a
17 railroad grade crossing photo violation-monitoring system is used and in
18 the aggregate on a daily, weekly and monthly basis;

19 5. the total number of notices of liability issued for violations
20 recorded by such systems;

21 6. the number of fines and total amount of fines paid after first
22 notice of liability issued for violations recorded by such systems;

23 7. the number of violations adjudicated and results of such adjudi-
24 cations including breakdowns of dispositions made for violations
25 recorded by such systems;

26 8. the total amount of revenue realized by such political subdivision
27 from such adjudications;

28 9. expenses incurred by such political subdivision in connection with
29 the program; and

30 10. quality of the adjudication process and its results.

31 (n) It shall be a defense to any prosecution for a violation of
32 section eleven hundred seventy of this article pursuant to a local law
33 or ordinance adopted pursuant to this section that the railroad signal
34 indications were malfunctioning at the time of the alleged violation.

35 § 3. Subdivision 2 of section 87 of the public officers law is amended
36 by adding a new paragraph (p) to read as follows:

37 (p) are photographs, microphotographs, videotape or other recorded
38 images prepared under the authority of section eleven hundred seventy-a
39 of the vehicle and traffic law.

40 § 4. This act shall take effect on the thirtieth day after it shall
41 have become a law, and shall expire and be deemed repealed 5 years after
42 such effective date.