
Transportation Committee

HB 3224

Brief Description: Reviewing and conducting studies on providing commuter rail services.

Sponsors: Representatives Loomis, Hunter, Sells and Liias.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Directs the Puget Sound Regional Council to analyze, and report to the Legislature on, whether commuter rail service between Eastern Snohomish County and Eastern King County can be a meaningful component of the region's future transportation system.

Hearing Date: 2/4/08

Staff: Kathryn Leathers (786-7114).

Background:

In 2003, the Burlington Northern Santa Fe (BNSF) Railway Company indicated its intent to divest approximately 40 miles of railroad corridor in east King and south Snohomish counties from its operational rail lines. The BNSF asked if there was public interest in maintaining or preserving this corridor for transportation purposes. In response, the Puget Sound Regional Council (PSRC) conducted a series of discussions with eight jurisdictions along the corridor as well as the Washington State Department of Transportation (Department); Sound Transit, the regional transit authority serving the region; and several environmental and related interest groups. The resulting recommendation was to preserve the corridor for future transportation uses; however, the Executive Board of the PSRC also recommended that further study be conducted.

Using federal grant funds, a subsequent study was conducted in 2006 by the PSRC's consultant team with extensive oversight from the BNSF Corridor Advisory Committee. The study covered the rail corridor from Renton to the City of Snohomish, including an eight-mile leg from Woodinville to Redmond, and examined current and potential future transportation uses for this corridor.

Multiple corridor use scenarios were considered and analyzed by the PSRC, including such uses as trail only; trail with current rail; and trail with increased rail. The Department's separate

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

Statewide Rail Capacity and Needs Study, which considered freight rail needs and explored ideas such as a state partnership with private sector companies, assisted the PSRC in reaching the conclusion that there is no strategic value to preserving the BNSF corridor as a freight corridor. The PSRC made final recommendations in January 2007 covering both short-term and long-term uses of the corridor, including the recommendation that the corridor be preserved for establishing a rail corridor trail alignment.

In 2007, leaders from King County, the Port of Seattle, and BNSF signed two memoranda of understanding formalizing proposals to exchange BNSF rail for the transfer of King County International Airport to the Port. In this proposal, King County will take over the BNSF rail line along the eastern edge of Lake Washington, which runs from north Renton to Snohomish. The Port, on behalf of King County, will pay BNSF \$103 million for approximately 40 miles of the rail line. The Port will also contribute up to \$66 million to King County toward development of a new regional trail, in exchange for the airport. Negotiations to finalize the proposal are ongoing.

Summary of Bill:

In regards to potential commuter rail service between Eastern Snohomish County and Eastern King County, the PSRC is directed to analyze any existing studies that contain information on whether commuter rail service can be a meaningful component of the region's future transportation system. If, after reviewing existing studies, the PSRC determines that existing information is insufficient to provide a complete analysis of the corridor, the PSRC must conduct a feasibility study to fill any gaps in information needed to complete its analysis.

A complete analysis of the corridor for commuter rail purposes includes, but is not limited to, an assessment of the number of potential riders in the region; locations that would most benefit from commuter rail service; estimated costs for securing rights and constructing stations; estimated costs for refurbishing the rail bed in the Woodinville subdivision to accommodate commuter light rail and for establishing a bicycle and pedestrian path along or near the Woodinville substations; and the ability of existing rail lines to accommodate commuter rail service.

The PSRC must submit a report on its results to the transportation committees of the Legislature by February 1, 2009.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on 2/3/08.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.