
Transportation Committee

ESSB 5768

Brief Description: Concerning the state route number 99 Alaskan Way viaduct replacement project.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Transportation (originally sponsored by Senators Murray, Jarrett, Swecker, Haugen and Kohl-Welles).

Brief Summary of Engrossed Substitute Bill

- Declares that the state will replace the Alaskan Way Viaduct (Viaduct) with a deep bore tunnel, which must include four general purpose lanes in a stacked formation.
- Establishes that state funding for the Viaduct will not exceed 2.4 billion and at least 400 million in toll revenue. Further establishes that state funding is not authorized for costs related to utility relocation, central seawall work, or waterfront promenade improvements.
- Directs the Washington State Department of Transportation to prepare a traffic and revenue study for the purpose of determining the bore tunnel's potential to generate toll revenue, and to provide a final report by January 2010 to the Governor and Legislature.

Hearing Date: 3/18/09

Staff: Kathryn Leathers (786-7114)

Background:

The State Route 99 Alaskan Way Viaduct (Viaduct) is a major arterial serving significant numbers of freight and passenger vehicles through downtown Seattle. Studies in the mid-1990s showed that the 1950s-era Viaduct was nearing the end of its useful life. The Viaduct's age and vulnerability were signaled by crumbling concrete, exposed rebar, cracking concrete, weakening column connections, and deteriorating railings.

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.

In early 2001, a team of design and seismic experts began work to determine whether it was feasible and cost-effective to strengthen the Viaduct by retrofitting it. During this investigation, the 6.8 magnitude Nisqually earthquake shook the Puget Sound region. The earthquake further damaged the Viaduct, causing the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) to temporarily shut it down.

A team of experts concluded that it was not cost-effective to fully retrofit the majority of the Viaduct; instead, the experts concluded that the Viaduct would need to be rebuilt or replaced. While inspections are regularly conducted and repairs have been made to keep the structure open to the public, the Viaduct is susceptible to damage, closure, or catastrophic failure from additional earthquakes and tsunamis.

The Alaskan Way seawall holds the soil in place along Seattle's waterfront. The seawall also holds in place the Alaskan Way surface street and many utilities. The Viaduct's foundations are embedded in the soil held back by the seawall. Experts believe that if the seawall were to fail, sections of the Viaduct, the Alaskan Way surface street, and adjacent structures and utilities could collapse or become unsafe. Periodic investigations conducted to assess the seawall's condition have revealed that the seawall is in poor condition, continues to deteriorate, and needs to be replaced.

In the initial Viaduct replacement planning stages, 76 conceptual alternatives were evaluated. From these alternatives, five concepts were identified for further consideration and analyzed in a 2004 Draft Environmental Impact Statement. Two alternatives were carried forward in the 2006 Supplemental Draft Environmental Impact Statement: an elevated six-lane structure and a four-lane cut-and-cover tunnel with surface transit improvements.

In 2006, the Legislature appointed an expert review panel to review finance and project implementation planning processes and assumptions for the two Viaduct alternatives. Based on the results of that review, the Governor was asked to make a finding as to whether each finance plan was feasible and sufficient to complete the project. The expert review panel found that, overall, the design and finance plans for both plans were substantially sound, although the finance plan included some estimates that were overly optimistic. In December 2006, the Governor ultimately determined that the choice should be made by the Seattle voters. As a result, in March 2007, an advisory ballot was submitted to the Seattle voters, but both options were rejected.

In 2007, the Legislature directed the Governor to convene a collaborative process involving key leaders to determine the final project design for the Viaduct. The transportation budget provided that the state's expenditures would not exceed 2.8 billion, and that a final design decision must be made by December 31, 2008. The WSDOT was directed to proceed with a series of projects on the Viaduct that are common to any design alternative. The state, county, and city departments of transportation convened an advisory stakeholder process spanning a 13-month period, resulting in several recommended alternatives, including a deep bore tunnel.

On January 13, 2009, the Governor, the City of Seattle, and King County agreed to replace the Viaduct with a deep bore tunnel design, with four general purpose lanes in a stacked formation. The deep bore construction is scheduled to begin in 2011. In the meantime, it is expected that construction and improvements will continue to be made on the north and south ends.

Summary of Bill:

The Legislature finds that replacing the existing State Route 99 Alaskan Way Viaduct (Viaduct) is a matter of urgency, and that the state must expedite the environmental review and design processes to replace the structure with a deep bore tunnel. The tunnel must be located under First Avenue from the vicinity of the sports stadiums in Seattle to Aurora Avenue north of the Battery Street tunnel, and must include four general purpose lanes in a stacked formation.

The Viaduct replacement project finance plan must include state funding not to exceed 2.4 billion and must also include at least 400 million in toll revenue. These funds must be used solely to build a replacement tunnel and to remove the existing viaduct structure. State funding may not be used for any utility relocation costs, or for central seawall or waterfront promenade improvements. The City of Seattle must bear all city utility relocation costs associated with the state work on the Viaduct replacement project.

The Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) is directed to conduct a traffic and revenue study of the deep bore tunnel for the purpose of determining the facility's potential to generate toll revenue. The study must include an analysis of potential diversion from the Viaduct and potential mitigation measures to offset or reduce diversion. The WSDOT must regularly submit progress reports to the Washington State Transportation Commission, and final study results are due to the Governor and the Legislature by January 2010.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: The bill contains an emergency clause and takes effect immediately.