

SENATE BILL REPORT

SSB 6205

As Passed Senate, February 12, 2010

Title: An act relating to portions of state highways better served by merged fire districts under certain circumstances.

Brief Description: Concerning portions of state highways better served by merged districts under certain circumstances.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Transportation (originally sponsored by Senators Haugen and Shin).

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Transportation: 1/14/10, 1/20/10 [DPS].
Passed Senate: 2/12/10, 48-0.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Bill No. 6205 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass.

Signed by Senators Haugen, Chair; Marr, Vice Chair; Swecker, Ranking Minority Member; Becker, Berkey, Delvin, Eide, Hatfield, Kastama, Kauffman, Kilmer and King.

Staff: Kelly Simpson (786-7403)

Background: Under current law, a fire protection district (fire district) may merge with an adjacent fire district under certain circumstances. The fire district with area to be merged into another district is referred to as the "merging district" and the fire district into which area is to be merged is referred to as the "merger district." The merger of fire districts may be subject to review by the boundary review board or boards of the county in which the merging district is located.

Generally, a merger is started with a petition signed by the merging district and filed with the merger district. An election is then held by voters of the merging district. If a majority of the voters approve the merger, the districts are declared merged. However, no election is required if three-fifths of all the qualified electors in the merging district sign a petition to merge.

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.

Additionally, a portion of a fire district may be merged with an adjacent fire district if the area can be better served by the merged district. A similar process exists in law for effecting a partial merger, including filing a petition and holding an election in the area to be merged. (With a partial merger, however, the applicable boundary review board(s) may trigger an election if either fire district does not approve the merger petition.) No election is required if three-fifths of all the qualified electors in the area to be merged sign a petition to merge.

Summary of Substitute Bill: An intent section states that the Legislature finds that portions of state highways may at times be better served by the merger of local fire districts serving the applicable stretch of highway due to the location of fire stations. The location of fire stations may result in liability burdens on the part of those responsible for managing that stretch of state highway due to delayed emergency response times. Therefore, the Legislature intends to streamline the existing mechanism for merging fire districts in order to better serve affected portions of state highways.

An additional process for effecting a partial merger of fire protection districts is established in law. The additional process is not subject to an election, approval by a boundary review board, or county legislative authority.

Under the new merger process, a portion of one fire district may be merged into an adjacent fire district if the following conditions are met:

- The area to be merged includes portions of a state highway, can be better served by the merger district, and has an assessed value of less than 0.5 percent of the total assessed value of the merging district;
- The merging district does not own a fire station in the area to be merged; and
- The merger district adopts a resolution (a) finding that the merger district can provide quicker emergency response times to the designated area and that the merger is in the public interest and (b) declaring the designated area merged. However, the merger district must consult with the merging district at least 30 days prior to adopting the resolution.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony on Original Bill: PRO: This bill would help areas that may suffer damage to state property because of delayed emergency response times, for example state highways. A recent incident where a fire broke out on the SR 532 bridge project involved delayed response times due to existing fire district boundaries and the location of existing fire stations. The entire population of Camano Island uses this bridge, but differing response times exist based on where local citizens reside. The existing boundaries are confusing to dispatchers. This bill would help clarify and speed up emergency response times in these instances.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Mike Ganz, Stephen Lich, Camano Island Fire & Rescue.