

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SSB 6237

As Passed House:

February 26, 1996

Title: An act relating to vehicles using wireless communications and computer systems.

Brief Description: Permitting the use of certain wireless communications and computer equipment in vehicles.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Transportation (originally sponsored by Senators Prince, Owen, Wood and Prentice).

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Transportation: 2/15/96, 2/20/96 [DP].

Floor Activity:

Passed House: 2/26/96, 95-0.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 25 members: Representatives K. Schmidt, Chairman; Benton, Vice Chairman; Mitchell, Vice Chairman; Skinner, Vice Chairman; R. Fisher, Ranking Minority Member; Hatfield, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Backlund; Blanton; Buck; Cairnes; Chopp; Elliot; Hankins; Horn; Johnson; McMahan; Ogden; Patterson; Quall; Robertson; Romero; D. Schmidt; Scott; Sterk and Tokuda.

Staff: Mary McLaughlin (786-7309).

Background: Current law prohibits the use of a television screen or viewer which is visible to the driver while operating a motor vehicle. A growing trend in law enforcement is the use of mobile computer systems that allow the officer to access driver information from the patrol car. The Washington State Patrol (WSP), King County, and the cities of Seattle and Tacoma are currently using this advanced technology in some of their vehicles. The mobile computer systems are connected by microwave to a mainframe computer in Tumwater, which contains information from the Department of Licensing and the Department of Corrections. The officer can access such information as driver and vehicle licensing, outstanding warrants, firearms permits, etc.

Current law also prohibits the use of a headset or earphones designed to receive a radio broadcast or play a recording that muffles other sounds while operating a motor vehicle. The use of cellular phones has grown dramatically over the past few years. New technology is now emerging that allows cellular communication without the use of a hand-held phone. One design currently being marketed is a cellular headset that covers one ear. Another is a speaker phone that clips to the vehicle visor.

Summary of Bill: Law enforcement vehicles may be equipped with mobile computer networks. Hands-free, wireless communication systems may be used by motorists while driving a motor vehicle, as approved by the Washington State Patrol.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

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

Testimony For: Hands-free cellular communication is a safety factor for the driver of a motor vehicle.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: Steve Gano, AT&T Wireless.