

HOUSE BILL REPORT

ESSB 6753

As Reported By House Committee On:
Transportation

Title: An act relating to agreements, advisory vote procedures, and funding for the Tacoma Narrows bridge under the public-private transportation initiatives program.

Brief Description: Improving the Tacoma Narrows bridge.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Transportation (originally sponsored by Senators Oke, Prince, Prentice, Sheldon, Swecker, Wojahn, Deccio, Schow, A. Anderson, Sellar, Winsley, Strannigan, Finkbeiner, Moyer, McDonald, Haugen, Wood and Rasmussen).

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Transportation: 2/20/96, 2/21/96 [DPA].

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION

Majority Report: Do pass as amended. Signed by 26 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; Brown; Buck; Cairnes; Chopp; Elliot; Hankins; Horn; Johnson; McMahan; Ogden; Patterson; Quall; Robertson; Romero; D. Schmidt; Scott; Sterk and Tokuda.

Staff: Vicki Fabre (786-7313).

Background: The existing four-lane Tacoma Narrows bridge, completed in 1950, is located on State Route (SR) 16 in Pierce County and is a major transportation link between the Seattle-Tacoma metropolitan area and the residents and commuters on the Olympic peninsula. The bridge is designated as a focal part of the "trunk system" in the statewide multimodal transportation plan.

Population and traffic growth in the corridor have resulted in increased congestion on the bridge, which operates at or beyond its design capacity of 60,000 vehicles per day, carrying as many as 79,000 vehicles per day. Traffic is expected to increase to over 100,000 vehicles a day by the year 2010. Expected traffic on the bridge and adjacent roads will expand the peak period congestion periods from three hours to

more than four hours during the morning and evening commute periods. The corridor is also a vital link between defense installations on the Kitsap peninsula and other defense industries on the east side of Puget Sound. State-operated ferries offer the only alternate route across Puget Sound.

The Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) has classified major improvements to the corridor, including a new bridge, as a long-range but unfunded need.

Improvements to the SR 16 corridor are proposed under the Public-Private Initiatives in Transportation (PPI) program, which was established in 1993 to test the feasibility of privately-financed transportation improvements in Washington State. The legislation provides a wide range of opportunities for private entities to undertake all or a portion of the study, planning design, finance, construction, operation and maintenance of transportation facilities that will become state owned. United Infrastructure of Washington (UIW) is the private developer of the proposed SR 16 project.

Changes in the program by the 1995 Legislature require an advisory vote on projects selected by the WSDOT that receive public opposition following selection, and prohibit the WSDOT from entering into agreements with private sector developers of projects with opposition, prior to the advisory vote taking place.

The Legislature has approved a \$25.6 million general obligation bond authorization to support state participation in the program. Legislative appropriation is required before any bonds are sold. The 1995 Legislature appropriated \$8.3 million from bond sales to cover technical studies to prepare for the advisory vote, legal and consulting costs, and other matters associated with selected projects.

Concern has been expressed that current law requiring that the advisory vote be on the imposition of tolls on conceptual projects will delay project construction and prevent a meaningful vote.

Proponents of changes in the PPI program favor an advisory vote on a preferred alternative that would be identified through the environmental impact statement (EIS) process under the state and, if applicable, federal environmental review process.

Summary of Amended Bill: The bill applies to all PPI projects selected to date and is not limited to the SR 16 corridor/Tacoma Narrows bridge improvement project.

For a PPI project that requires a vote, such vote must be on the preferred alternative identified through the environmental review process required by the State Environmental Protection Act (SEPA) and, if applicable, the National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA).

The execution of the advisory vote process for a project by the WSDOT is subject to the prior appropriation by the Legislature of funds to conduct environmental impact studies, a public involvement program, local involvement committee activities, traffic and economic impact analysis, engineering and technical studies, and the advisory vote.

WSDOT is authorized to enter into a contract with a developer of a PPI project to conduct the work necessary to identify the preferred alternative.

WSDOT is prohibited from entering into a franchise agreement with a developer of projects that receive funding for environmental and engineering studies, etc., prior to the advisory vote on the preferred alternative.

Amended Bill Compared to Engrossed Substitute Bill: The engrossed substitute bill allowed a vote on a preferred alternative for only those projects that receive funding for environmental and engineering analyses.

The amended bill allows all projects requiring an advisory vote to execute a vote on a preferred alternative, with the condition that WSDOT can only proceed with the work to carry out the vote if the Legislature provides the funding to do so.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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

Testimony For: State funding for environmental and engineering studies is necessary to identify a preferred alternative. Identification of the preferred alternative will lead to a more meaningful advisory vote.

The proposed changes in the PPI program will lead to earlier development of a solution that relieves congestion in the SR 16 corridor. The current state of congestion on the Tacoma Narrows bridge is an impediment to housing development in the Gig Harbor/Key Peninsula area and to the sale of existing housing. Construction of improvements in the SR 16 corridor and on the Tacoma Narrows bridge will save lives, improve the quality of life for commuters, and provide numerous employment opportunities.

Testimony Against: The SR 16 corridor improvements submitted under the United Infrastructure of Washington proposal should be abandoned in favor of a North Puget Sound bridge.

Funding for environmental and engineering studies, etc. on all projects requiring an advisory vote (SRs 16, 520, and 522) should be provided in the 1996 supplemental transportation budget.

The solutions offered under the selected PPI proposal for the Tacoma Narrows bridge don't address the congestion problems of the entire SR 16 corridor.

Testified: Senator Bob Oke, prime sponsor (pro); Matt Jeffrey, Port Orchard citizen (pro); Carole Holmaas, Gig Harbor realtor (pro); John Holmaas, Gig Harbor realtor (pro); Tom Morfee, Peninsula Neighborhood Association (con); Gordon Walgren, United Infrastructure of Washington (pro); Les Books, United Infrastructure of Washington (pro); Randy Boss, Gig Harbor citizen (con); Carla Palmer, Silverdale citizen (pro); Stan Palmer, Silverdale citizen (pro); Lois Eyrse, Gig Harbor/Peninsula Area Chamber of Commerce (pro); Robert Dilger, Gig Harbor citizen (pro); Gerald Dickson, CAUGHT (pro); Walt Smith, Active Construction (pro); Norma Smith, homemaker (pro); Dave Morris, Gig Harbor citizen (pro); John Bozich, Gig Harbor citizen (pro); Bob Mack, Washington Transportation Partners (con); and Jerry Ellis, Department of Transportation (pro).