

SENATE BILL REPORT

ESSB 5877

As Passed Senate, March 10, 1995

Title: An act relating to the regulation of limousines, taxicabs, and other for hire vehicle services.

Brief Description: Regulating limousines, taxicabs, and other for hire vehicles.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Transportation (originally sponsored by Senators Heavey, Haugen, Wood, Deccio and Rasmussen).

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Transportation: 2/23/95, 3/1/95 [DPS].
Passed Senate, 3/10/95, 41-2.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Bill No. 5877 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass.

Signed by Senators Owen, Chair; Heavey, Vice Chair; Fairley, Haugen, Kohl, Morton, Oke, Schow, Sellar and Wood.

Staff: Mary McLaughlin (786-7309)

Background: Cities, counties and port districts may regulate taxicab services within their respective jurisdictions with regards to licensing, entry, rates, routes, safety, equipment and insurance requirements. A city, county or port district may enter into a cooperative agreement with another city, county or port district for the joint regulation of taxicabs.

Taxi services that are not regulated by cities, counties or port districts must obtain a for hire permit/certificate from the Department of Licensing (DOL), and have on file, a surety bond or liability insurance for each vehicle. The requirements apply to vehicles transporting passengers for compensation. Exempt vehicles include commercial buses, school buses, ride-sharing vehicles and limousines.

Limousine services are regulated by the Utilities and Transportation Commission (UTC). Certain entry (fit, willing and able), safety, equipment and insurance requirements must be met. The UTC does not regulate limousine rates or routes.

A limousine, by definition, is a vehicle with a seating capacity of four to 16 persons, excluding the driver, that, under a single contract, is used to transport a person or group to a specific destination. This definition has raised two issues: what constitutes a single contract, and what kinds of vehicles can currently qualify as limos.

"Black cars" operating at Sea-Tac Airport are treated as for hire vehicles rather than taxis or limos.

Summary of Bill: The regulation of limousine services remains with the Utilities and Transportation Commission (UTC). However, a port district with a population of one million or more (King County/Sea-Tac International Airport) may regulate limousines operating within its jurisdiction with regard to licensing, safety, equipment and chauffeur qualifications. Licensing consists of obtaining a for hire certificate and permit from DOL, and any other permit that may be required by the port district.

A limousine is defined as a chauffeur-driven, luxury automobile with a rear seating capacity of four to 12. The vehicle has an extended wheelbase that meets Washington State Patrol standards, and the rear seating compartment contains a television, musical sound system, telephone, ice storage, power-operated divider or additional interior lighting. Taxicabs or other for hire vehicles, hearses or other funeral home vehicles, station wagons, trucks, vans, minivans, buses or minibuses are excluded from the definition.

Limousine carriers must operate out of offices; a vehicle is not considered an office. Arrangements for limousine services must be prearranged through the carrier's office and then transmitted to the limo. Customers cannot make arrangements with the driver for the immediate rental of a limousine, even if the driver is the owner. The exception is stand-hail limos at Sea-Tac Airport that are licensed by the Port of Seattle.

Cities, towns and municipalities (other than port districts) are prohibited from enacting ordinances regulating chauffeurs and limousine services. Cities, towns and counties may regulate for hire vehicles (including "black cars") within their respective jurisdictions with regard to entry, rates, routes, safety, insurance and licensing. Nonprofit transportation providers for the elderly or handicapped, charter and excursion buses and courtesy vans are specifically excluded from the for hire permit/certificate provisions administered by DOL.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

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

Testimony For: The bill gives the Port of Seattle the ability to regulate "black cars" at SeaTac airport. Tightening the definition of limo prevents "black cars" from registering as limos.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: Doug Bohlke, Evergreen Taxi Assn. (pro); Rick Jensen, Limousine Assn. of WA (pro); Don Lewis, WUTC; Craig Olson, Assn. of Cities (concerns); Tom Tanaka, Port of Seattle (pro); John Ruhl, Seattle Tacoma International Taxi Assn. (pro); Jim Buck, King County Licensing (pro).