

# SENATE BILL REPORT

## ESSB 6753

---

As Passed Senate, February 13, 1996

**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: 2/6/96 [DPS].  
Passed Senate, 2/13/96, 43-0.

---

### SENATE COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION

**Majority Report:** That Substitute Senate Bill No. 6753 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass.

Signed by Senators Owen, Chair; Heavey, Vice Chair; Goings, Morton, Oke, Prentice, Prince, Rasmussen, Schow, Sellar, Thibaudeau and Wood.

**Staff:** Vicki Fabre (786-7313)

**Background:** The existing four-lane Tacoma Narrows bridge, completed in 1950, is located on State Route 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 dense 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 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 received 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 \$25.0 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 a conceptual project 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 federal environmental review process.

**Summary of Bill:** WSDOT is authorized to enter into a contract with a developer of a PPI project that receives state funding for environmental, engineering and technical studies and public involvement to conduct work necessary for identifying the preferred alternative identified under the requirements of SEPA and NEPA that will be the subject of the advisory vote by users and residents in the affected project area.

WSDOT cannot enter into a franchise agreement with a developer of PPI projects that receive funding for environmental and engineering studies, etc., prior to the advisory vote on the preferred alternative.

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Requested.

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

[Statements for and against are taken from testimony given on SB 6509 which is identical to SB 6753.]

**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 underlying legislation prohibits an advisory vote prior to the state entering into an agreement with the private sector developer.

The SR 16 corridor improvements submitted under the UIW proposal should be abandoned in favor of a North Puget Sound bridge.

The legislation, by funding environmental and engineering studies etc. for only the SR 16 corridor improvements, gives preferential treatment to that project to the disadvantage of the SR 520 and 522 projects. Absent the same funding for the latter, the advisory vote will be on a project concept instead of an identified preferred alternative.

**Testified:** Senator Oke, prime sponsor; Jerry Ellis, WSDOT; Jerry Pfeffer, United Infrastructure of WA (pro); Matt Ryan, Kitsap Co. Commissioner (pro); Kal Leichtman (con); Randy Boss (con); Walt Smith, Active Const. (pro); Duke Schaub, AGC-WA (pro); Bob Dilger, WA State Building Trades (pro); Allan Darr, Operating Engineers (pro); Helen Coyne-Hoerle (con); Mark Williamson, Kitsap Assn. of Realtors (pro); John Hallawell (pro); Jared Smith, Bob Mack, WA Transportation Partners (con); Richard Yaeger, Peninsula Neighborhood Assn. (con); John Holmaas (pro); Matt Jeffrey (pro); Tom Morfee, Peninsula Neighborhood Assn.; Don Williams, taxpayer.

**House Amendment(s):** 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 Policy Act (SEPA) and, if applicable, the National Environmental Policy 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.