

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 2866

As Reported By House Committee On:
Transportation

Title: An act relating to operation of ferries in Washington state.

Brief Description: Creating the joint task force on ferries.

Sponsors: Representatives Fisher and Mitchell.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Transportation: 1/25/00, 2/7/00 [DPS].

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Creates a joint ferry task force to study and make recommendations on the future of the Washington state ferry system following the passage of Initiative 695.
- The task force will include eight legislators and at least one representative from: ferry advisory committees; non-ferry users; labor; WSF; transit operators; the Office of Financial Management; and other groups as deemed appropriate by the co-chairs.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 23 members: Representatives Fisher, Democratic Co-Chair; Mitchell, Republican Co-Chair; Cooper, Democratic 1st Vice Chair; Edwards, Democratic 2nd Vice Chair; Ericksen, Republican Vice Chair; Hankins, Republican Vice Chair; Buck; G. Chandler; DeBolt; Fortunato; Haigh; Hatfield; Hurst; Lovick; McDonald; Ogden; Pflug; Radcliff; Romero; Schindler; Skinner; Wood and Woods.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 3 members: Representatives Mielke; Morris and Murray.

Staff: Paul Neal (786-7315).

Background:

Initiative 695 (I-695) eliminated the Motor Vehicle Excise Tax (MVET) in November of 1999. The Washington State Ferries (WSF) received a substantial portion of its operating and capital funds from the MVET. The loss of this revenue has raised questions about what ferry service should be provided by WSF and how that service should be paid for.

Summary of Substitute Bill:

HB 2866 establishes a joint task force on ferries. The task force includes two members from each of the four major caucuses of the Legislature. Each caucus must appoint one member with a ferry route terminus in his or her district and one member without a ferry route terminus in his or her district. The task force will have two co-chairs: one from the House and one from the Senate. The task force will also include at least one representative from: ferry advisory committees; non-ferry users; labor; Washington State Ferries; transit operators; the Office of Financial Management; and other groups as deemed appropriate by the co-chairs. The bill includes an emergency clause.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill: The substitute bill deletes route equity from the list of items to be addressed by joint task force and charges the task force with establishing a long-term goal for farebox recovery.

The substitute bill deleted the legislative finding that ferry fares are not a tax under I-695 and are therefore not subject to the public vote requirement. The substitute bill also deleted the authorization to the Transportation Commission to increase ferry fares in excess of the fiscal growth factor established by Initiative 601.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Effective Date of Substitute Bill: This bill contains an emergency clause and takes effect immediately.

Testimony For: The ferry system is facing a major fiscal challenge in the wake of the passage of I-695. This bill provides a workable framework for addressing that challenge. Authorizing the commission to adjust fares without a public vote allows the system to implement fare increases that will not be as high as otherwise required.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: Tom Green, Washington State Transportation Commission; Sophia Byrd, Washington State Association of Counties; Joe Daniels, Puget Sound District Council; and Pare Abbit, Marine Engineers Benevolent Association.