

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5273

As Reported By Senate Committee On:
Transportation, February 17, 1999

Title: An act relating to a scenic byways designation program.

Brief Description: Creating a scenic byways designation program.

Sponsors: Senators Jacobsen, Haugen, Rasmussen, Gardner, Prentice, Patterson, Winsley and Fraser.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Transportation: 2/16/99, 2/17/99 [DPS].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Bill No. 5273 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass.

Signed by Senators Haugen, Chair; Gardner, Vice Chair; Goings, Vice Chair; Benton, Costa, Eide, Horn, Morton, Oke, Patterson, Prentice, Sellar, Sheahan, T. Sheldon and Shin.

Staff: Ashley Probart (786-7319)

Background: The Transportation Equity Act of the 21st Century (TEA-21) continues the national "scenic byways" grant program that was created in 1991. This act requires all routes that are nominated as scenic byways to be officially designated by a state process. Currently only state highways with the designation "scenic and recreational highway" are eligible to compete for federal funding and recognition under the national program. Current state law does not allow local routes with similar characteristics and qualities to participate in the program.

Current law directs the Department of Transportation (WSDOT) to develop a scenic and recreational highways program that may identify entire highway loops or similar tourist routes that could be developed to promote tourist activity while protecting the scenic and recreational quality surrounding state highways. Many of these scenic and recreational highways were first designated in 1967 and additions to the system were included in 1993.

In 1995, the report "Defining Washington's Heritage Programs" made several recommendations on the management of a statewide scenic byways program which were adopted by the Transportation Commission. They included making local routes eligible for the program, revising the designation criteria to be contemporary with ISTEA (now TEA-21), and to provide for a "de-designation process" if a route no longer possesses the intrinsic qualities that supported its initial designation.

During this same time, communities have requested WSDOT to re-evaluate several non-designated state highways for inclusion in the system.

The "Defining Washington's Heritage Programs" report and community requests are the basis for this legislation.

Summary of Substitute Bill: A "scenic byway" designation program is created that includes both state and local transportation routes.

The nomination for a scenic byway can be either from the state, local jurisdictions, or organizations that receive demonstrated public support from the communities along the route. The nominating entity is responsible for the costs associated with the nomination. Participation in the program is voluntary.

Authority for designation of a scenic byway is the responsibility of the Transportation Commission. Byways so designated do not become part of the scenic and recreational highway system (state-owned highways) unless approved by the Legislature. De-designation of a route can occur if it no longer possesses the intrinsic qualities that supported its initial designation. De-designation results in discontinued state support for the route. De-designation may be initiated at the local or state level.

The original criteria for the selection of a scenic byway are repealed. By December 31, 1999, the Department of Transportation is required, in consultation with numerous agencies and organizations, to develop criteria for assessing scenic byways and heritage tour routes. The criteria are to include an appropriate method for the nomination and application for designation or de-designation of the byways.

The Department of Transportation is authorized to designate eligible state highways as scenic byways on an interim basis, but only for the purposes of leveraging federal planning grant funds.

Technical corrections are made to reflect changes in funding programs at the federal level.

It is now optional for the Department of Transportation and the Parks and Recreation Commission to include byways on state maps or other relevant, descriptive materials.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill: Washington-based automobile clubs are included among the organizations that will help to develop criteria for assessing scenic byways and heritage tour routes.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available

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

Testimony For: This bill is customer driven and creates a level playing field for the state and local jurisdictions. Both are able to receive technical assistance and be eligible for federal funds.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: PRO: Senator Jacobsen, prime sponsor; Judy Lorenzo, Dept. of Transportation; Greg Hanon, AAA Washington (w/amendment).