

SENATE BILL REPORT

SSB 5681

As Passed Senate, March 13, 2001

Title: An act relating to weight limits for fire-fighting apparatus.

Brief Description: Permitting excess weight for fire-fighting apparatus.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Transportation (originally sponsored by Senators Kastama, Horn, Haugen and Oke; by request of Washington State Patrol).

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Transportation: 2/19/01, 3/7/01 [DPS, DNP].
Passed Senate: 3/13/01, 46-1.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Bill No. 5681 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass.

Signed by Senators Haugen, Chair; Gardner, Vice Chair; Eide, Finkbeiner, Horn, Jacobsen, Kastama, McDonald, Oke, Patterson, Prentice, T. Sheldon, Shin and Swecker.

Minority Report: Do not pass.
Signed by Senator Benton.

Staff: Dean Carlson (786-7305)

Background: Commercial vehicles have restrictions on their gross weight and on the weight per axle or axle grouping. When it is reasonable and necessary for vehicles to carry a load that will exceed these weight limitations, the carrier may apply in writing for a special permit (if they have an adequate number of axles) from the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT).

Currently, fire trucks may receive special permits if their gross weight on a single axle does not exceed 24,000 pounds and the gross weight on a tandem axle does not exceed 43,000 pounds.

There are some fire trucks in use which exceed the maximum weight restrictions to receive a special permit.

Summary of Bill: Fire-fighting apparatus is defined. The apparatus must comply with federal and state vehicle operating and safety criteria including rules adopted by agencies within each jurisdiction. All owners of fire-fighting apparatus must comply with load restrictions of bridges. Weight and size limits for fire-fighting apparatus is defined. Special permits are allowed to be issued for fire-fighting apparatus that exceeds weight and size limits for those that are in operation prior to July 1, 2001.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

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

Testimony For: Some very expensive apparatus currently in use are not legal. DOT will be able to guide the apparatus to the best routes. DOT would like to work with staff on some issues. Central Pierce Fire Rescue currently has two bucket trucks that are not legal, but were legal at the time of purchase. These weight capacities do not exceed manufacturers recommendations. Currently, platform ladder trucks cannot be sold in Washington. This allows Washington to have the technology available to all but one other state. Washington is the worst state in the country for available fire-fighting apparatus. Communities are outpacing the ability to provide service especially with aerial apparatus. We now have to buy two vehicles that have the same pumping capacity as one of the new ones.

Testimony Against: These changes bring up safety problems due to the heavy weights and high speeds. Other manufacturers can make fire trucks at legal weights. This could allow for less staff which is a safety concern. It has been shown that with less fire fighters injuries and death rise.

Testified: Fred McPherson, Pierce Manufacturing Incorporated (pro); Chief Gary Olson, Lynnwood/Edmonds Fire Departments (pro); Chief Gary Russell, Whatcom County Fire District #7 (pro); Captain Eric Robertson, Washington State Patrol (pro); Barry Diseth, Department of Transportation (concerns); Cody Arledge, Washington State Council of Fire Fighters (con); Jack Andren, Central Pierce Fire Rescue (pro); Bill Thomas, Central Pierce Fire Rescue (pro).