
Transportation Committee

HB 1429

Brief Description: Authorizing personal rapid transit and magnetic levitation transit systems.

Sponsors: Representatives Dickerson, Ericksen, Murray, Linville, B. Sullivan, Lovick, Talcott, Campbell, Chase, Nixon and Simpson.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Authorizes magnetic levitation and personal rapid transit high capacity transportation systems.
- Authorizes the adoption of dedicated funding sources for magnetic levitation and personal rapid transit systems and the use of public-private partnerships.
- Exempts counties implementing magnetic levitation and personal rapid transit systems from the population requirements otherwise applicable to high capacity transportation systems.
- Requires the Department of Transportation to establish a grant program for magnetic levitation and personal rapid transit systems with assistance from an appointed board.

Hearing Date: 2/23/05

Staff: David Munnecke (786-7315).

Background:

In the early 1990s, high-capacity transportation (HTC) systems were authorized to offer public transportation services within an urbanized region operating on authorized exclusive right of ways along with the supporting services and facilities necessary to implement the system. The services are to provide a higher level of passenger capacity, speed and service frequency. Transit agencies, which include city owned transit systems, county transportation authorities, metropolitan municipal corporations and public transportation benefit areas, are responsible for planning, construction and operations. A planning process is outlined in statute.

Only transit agencies in counties with a population of 175,000 or more that have an interstate highway within their borders, except for any county having a population of more than one million or a county that has a population of more than 400,000 and is adjacent to a county with a population of one million or more may operate a HTC system.

The HTC agencies may use the following dedicated voter approved funding sources: employer tax and sales and use tax. These taxes are in addition to any federal, state, local and private sector assistance available.

The HTC systems are defined in statute as rapid rail system, monorail, trolley or other fixed rail guideway. Magnetic levitation and personal rapid transit, relatively new technologies, are not in that definition.

Magnetic levitation (maglev) is a system in which magnetic force lifts, propels and guides a vehicle over a guideway at speeds of 250 to 300 miles per hour. The concept of magnetically levitated trains was first identified around 1900, but significant advancements in maglev technology did not occur until relatively recently. While Germany and Japan have spent significant amounts of time and money developing maglev technology over the last several decades, comparatively little research was performed in the U.S. until the 1990s when the National Maglev Initiative was established.

To evaluate the potential for maglev to improve intercity transportation and to determine an appropriate role for the federal government, the "Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century" (TEA 21) was passed in 1998, which created a National Magnetic Levitation Technology Deployment Program.

Summary of Bill:

The bill adds magnetic levitation and personal rapid transit systems to the existing high capacity transportation statutes.

Counties are authorized to impose with voter approval, by a simple majority of those voting, dedicated funding sources already allowed in statute for other high capacity systems. Funding for magnetic levitation and personal rapid transit systems is limited along with all of the entities in a county implementing these systems to the maximum rate for each of the existing funding options.

The population requirements in the existing high capacity transportation statutes do not apply, so all counties in the state can implement magnetic levitation and personal rapid transit systems.

Counties implementing magnetic levitation and personal rapid transit systems are authorized to use public private partnerships.

The Department of Transportation will develop, implement, and administer a grant program for state and federal funding identified for magnetic levitation and personal rapid transit systems.

The Speaker of the House will appoint four representatives, two from each caucus, the President of the Senate will appoint four senators, two from each caucus, and the Governor will appoint a business person and a person with academic credentials in magnetic levitation and personal rapid transit systems to work with the Department of Transportation to develop the criteria for the grant program.

Entities wanting to obtain grants from Department of Transportation will submit design proposals to the department and will compete based on the established criteria.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect on August 1, 2005.