

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 6509

As of January 30, 1996

Title: An act relating to bonds authorized for Tacoma Narrows bridge improvements.

Brief Description: Improving the Tacoma Narrows bridge.

Sponsors: Senators Oke, Prince, Heavey, Rasmussen, Sheldon, Winsley, Prentice, Morton, Snyder, Haugen, McDonald, West, Sellar, Finkbeiner, Swecker, Strannigan, Johnson, Wood, Hochstatter, Schow, Deccio, Kohl, Pelz, Moyer, Wojahn, Bauer, Fairley, Zarelli, Cantu, Fraser and Sutherland.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Transportation: 1/30/96.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION

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 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. The bridge and adjacent roads are expected to incur traffic that will expand the peak period congestion periods from three hours to more than four hours during the morning and evening commute period. 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.

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 the 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 the prohibition against WSDOT entering into an agreement with the private sector developer until the advisory vote occurs, and the requirement that the advisory vote be on the 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 Environmental Protection Act (SEPA). Additionally, proponents favor the advisory vote taking place under an agreement with the developer, and the appropriation by the Legislature of bond proceeds to fund the EIS and other technical work.

Summary of Substitute Bill: The WSDOT is not prohibited from entering into an agreement with a private developer of PPI projects selected before September 1, 1994 or after June 30, 1997 that receive public opposition if the Legislature has appropriated funds to conduct environmental impact studies, public involvement and engineering and technical studies. The projects are also exempt from the technical work requirements preceding the advisory vote for other selected projects that have public opposition, but do not receive the funding described above.

However, the agreement for projects that receive funding for the environmental, public involvement, engineering and technical work must require the developer to conduct an advisory vote by users of and residents in the affected project area, and the vote must be on the preferred alternative identified under the requirements of SEPA or NEPA.

Current law making an advisory vote permissive after an agreement is entered into between the WSDOT and the private developer of projects selected prior to September 1, 1994 or after June 30, 1997 and that do not have public opposition is unchanged.

A total of \$10 million is appropriated from the sale of PPI bonds for work associated with the SR 16 corridor improvements. Up to \$5 million of that amount is for environmental studies, public involvement and the advisory vote. Up to an additional \$5 million of the total is to be used for the state's 50 percent share of the cost of engineering and technical studies conducted for SR 16 corridor improvements.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill: Subject to prior legislative appropriation of the bond proceeds, the original bill authorizes the issuance and sale of \$500 million of general obligation bonds for location, design and construction of improvements to the Tacoma Narrows bridge. The WSDOT is authorized to fix tolls on the bridge, with the approval of the Transportation Commission, sufficient to pay all expenses of operating, maintaining, managing and repairing the toll bridge.

Appropriation: \$10 million.

Fiscal Note:

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