

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 6709

As of February 5, 1996

Title: An act relating to powers of regional transportation authorities.

Brief Description: Extending powers of regional transportation authorities.

Sponsors: Senator Prentice.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Transportation: 2/5/96.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION

Staff: Gene Baxstrom (786-7303)

Background: A regional transit authority that encompasses parts of King, Pierce and Snohomish Counties and transit systems in Clark, Kitsap, Spokane, Thurston, and Yakima counties are authorized to plan a high capacity transportation (HCT) system within their jurisdictions and to collect voter-approved taxes for development and operation of such systems. The voter approved taxes are an up to 0.9 percent sales tax, an up to 0.8 percent motor vehicle excise tax, and an up to \$ \$2/month/employee tax.

An HCT system is defined as a "system of public transportation services within an urbanized region operating principally on exclusive rights of way, and the supporting services and facilities necessary to implement such a system, including interim express services and high occupancy vehicle lanes, which taken as a whole, provides a substantially higher level of passenger capacity, speed and service frequency than traditional public transportation systems operating principally in general purpose roadways."

Virtually all high occupancy vehicle lanes developed in the state are in the central Puget Sound area and are on state highways. The Department of Transportation is currently responsible for funding, developing and operating such high occupancy vehicle lanes located on state highways.

The county councils of King, Pierce and Snohomish counties voted in 1993 to establish the Central Puget Sound Regional Transit Authority (RTA). Voters in the RTA boundaries turned down a March 1995 proposition to fund and develop an HCT system which consisted principally of rail components. Recent policies of the RTA board have been to provide a broader mix of transportation services to address the region's mobility needs. These include more emphasis on bus service and facilities, and transportation demand management strategies which better serve certain suburban areas. In February 1995, voters in Clark County defeated a proposed plan to develop a light rail line in Vancouver and connecting to Portland's existing light rail system.

Summary of Bill: The definition of high capacity transportation is expanded to also include transportation services operating principally on freeways, as well as on exclusive rights of way. The Department of Transportation and a regional transit authority (RTA) are authorized to contract with each other to implement and provide assistance, property rights, loans, and grants for high-capacity, high-occupancy vehicle systems and state highways mutually beneficial to both parties and to public mobility.

The purposes for which high capacity transportation funds may be used are expanded to include high-occupancy vehicle systems and transportation system management and demand management strategies.

The authority for an RTA to impose the sales and use tax is modified to permit differing levels of tax within the authority's boundaries. These differing levels must be based on factors such as availability of different levels and types of high capacity services, levels of capital investments, hours of service, and other reasonable factors. Tax rates must be in increments of one-tenths of 1 percent.

An RTA is authorized to provide service outside its boundaries. Territory annexed to a city which is within the RTA is to be included in the RTA. Elections to annex areas to an RTA can be held at any time, rather than only after an RTA has been approved by the voters. An RTA is specifically defined as a municipal corporation.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on January 31, 1996.

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