

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5157

As of January 31, 2019

Title: An act relating to requiring the department of transportation to complete a study on passenger-only ferry services.

Brief Description: Requiring the department of transportation to complete a study on passenger-only ferry services.

Sponsors: Senators Hunt, Wellman, Kuderer, Carlyle and Darneille.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Transportation: 1/30/19.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Directs the Department of Transportation to complete a study of passenger ferry service between Olympia and Seattle.
- Requires a report to the Legislature by January 7, 2020.
- Requires funding to be provided in the 2019 transportation budget bill, or else the bill becomes null and void.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION

Staff: Hayley Gamble (786-7452)

Background: Scheduled travel by water began in Puget Sound in the 1850s on a variety of vessels. These vessels, later known collectively as the Mosquito fleet, offered passenger service to destinations including Olympia and Seattle. By the 1930s these services were greatly reduced, and eventually replaced in 1951 by a state operated ferry service. There are currently several public ferry systems serving various parts of Puget Sound, the largest of which are:

- the Washington State Ferry System serving central and northern Puget Sound;
- King County passenger ferries serving Vashon Island and Seattle;
- Pierce County ferries serving Steilacoom, Ketrion Island and Anderson Island; and
- Kitsap Transit passenger ferries serving Kingston, Bremerton, Port Orchard, and Seattle.

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

There are also several private ferry operators in Puget Sound, and public ferries in other areas of the state. Currently, there are no public or private ferry services operating in south Puget Sound.

Summary of Bill: The Legislature recognizes the need for alternative strategies to provide reliable travel times in Puget Sound and the potential to use waterways as travel options.

The Department of Transportation (DOT) shall complete a consultant study on the feasibility, need and potential governance and funding structures for passenger ferry service between Olympia and Seattle. The study will look at both a fast service and a slower service with additional stops. DOT must work with stakeholders and submit a final study to the transportation committees of the Legislature by January 7, 2020.

Appropriation: The bill contains a null and void clause requiring specific funding be provided in the Omnibus Transportation Appropriations Act.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Creates Committee/Commission/Task Force that includes Legislative members: No.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: This concept was introduced last year. The Port of Olympia is studying passenger-only ferries (POF), Tacoma recently finished a POF study. The Puget Sound Regional Council (PSRC) may look at this. I would like to see this move forward in an inclusive fashion. Transit between cities is lacking, this study would gather data on a POF system, which would help estimate costs. There could be environmental benefits. The ride could take around 90 minutes. Capital costs could be covered by federal grants. City of Tacoma supports POF service and the PSRC approach funded in the Governor's budget. Olympia to Seattle route would be part of PSRC study.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator Sam Hunt, Prime Sponsor; Charles Adkins, Director of Legislative Affairs, Geoduck Student Union; Annie Landis, Legislative Liaison, Geoduck Student Union; Briahna Murray, City of Tacoma.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: No one.