

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SHB 2050

As Passed Legislature

Title: An act relating to county ferry systems.

Brief Description: Revising the state subsidy of county ferries.

Sponsor(s): By House Committee on Transportation (originally sponsored by Representatives R. Meyers, Spanel and R. Johnson).

Brief History:

Reported by House Committee on:
Transportation, March 7, 1991, DPS;
Passed House, March 20, 1991, 98-0;
Amended by Senate;
House concurred;
Passed Legislature, 93-0.

**HOUSE COMMITTEE ON
TRANSPORTATION**

Majority Report: *That Substitute House Bill No. 2050 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass.*
Signed by 27 members: Representatives R. Fisher, Chair; R. Meyers, Vice Chair; Betrozoff, Ranking Minority Member; Chandler, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Basich; Brough; Cantwell; Cooper; Day; G. Fisher; Forner; Haugen; Heavey; Horn; P. Johnson; R. Johnson; Jones; Kremen; Mitchell; Nelson; Orr; Prentice; Prince; Schmidt; Wilson; Wood; and Zellinsky.

Staff: Gene Schlatter (786-7316).

Background: The Washington county ferry systems are of two distinct types. The Puget Island ferry in Wahkiakum County has state significance as a connecting link between SR4 in Washington and US30 in Oregon, and as a detour route during closures of SR4. The Pierce, Skagit and Whatcom County ferry systems serve primarily local interests.

Since 1976, the three Puget Sound county ferry systems have received pro rata shares of a \$500,000 per biennium subsidy. The subsidy, intended to fund up to 50 percent of the counties' operations and maintenance deficits, is taken from the county portion of the motor vehicle excise tax (MVET)

prior to its distribution to the counties and is apportioned according to the relative operations and maintenance deficits in Pierce, Skagit and Whatcom Counties. No provision is made for capital improvements to county ferries.

The Wahkiakum County ferry receives a subsidy of 80 percent of its operating deficit from the state portion of the Motor Vehicle Fund. Further recognition of this ferry's state significance is demonstrated by the 100 percent support that the ferry receives during the periods when it is used as a state highway detour route.

Summary of Bill: The biennial subsidy for the Pierce, Skagit and Whatcom County ferries is increased from \$500,000 to \$1,000,000 from the counties' share of the fuel tax.

In addition, the County Road Administration Board may recommend capital improvements to the Legislature which will be funded from the counties' share of the fuel tax.

Counties requesting funding for ferry capital improvements must first seek funding from the Public Works Trust Fund when appropriate.

County ferry fares can not be reduced because of the increased operating subsidy.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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

Testimony For: The operating subsidy has not been increased for 15 years. Also, there is a need to address necessary capital improvements.

Testimony Against: None.

Witnesses: Vern Wagar, County Road Administration Board; John Trent, Pierce County Public Works; and Mary Sturm, Anderson Island.