

SENATE BILL REPORT

SHB 2050

AS REPORTED BY COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION, APRIL 2, 1991

Brief Description: Revising the state subsidy of county ferries.

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

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION

SENATE COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION

Majority Report: Do pass as amended.

Signed by Senators Patterson, Chairman; von Reichbauer, Vice Chairman; Erwin, Hansen, Madsen, McMullen, Oke, Sellar, Skratek, Snyder, Thorsness, and Vognild.

Staff: Gene Schlatter (786-7316)

Hearing Dates: April 2, 1991

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 fuel tax 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:

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.

Appropriation: none

Revenue: none

Fiscal Note: available

SUMMARY OF PROPOSED SENATE AMENDMENT:

It is clarified that tolls on the county ferries shall not be lower than tolls that were in place on January 1, 1990.

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

TESTIFIED: Vern Wagar, County Road Administration Board; George Walk, Pierce County