

# SENATE BILL REPORT

## SB 6108

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As of February 7, 2020

**Title:** An act relating to nullifying certain taxes approved by regional transit authority voters.

**Brief Description:** Nullifying certain taxes approved by regional transit authority voters.

**Sponsors:** Senators O'Ban, Becker, Braun and Sheldon.

**Brief History:**

**Committee Activity:** Transportation: 2/04/20.

**Brief Summary of Bill**

- Nullifies any taxes approved by Regional Transit Authority voters after January 1, 2015, within a county with a population of less than 1 million that contains a city with a population of more than 200,000.

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### SENATE COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION

**Staff:** Daniel Masterson (786-7454)

**Background:** A Regional Transit Authority (RTA) is authorized to use its tax revenues to plan, construct, and operate high-capacity transportation, such as express bus service and light rail. There is currently one RTA—Sound Transit—which operates light rail, commuter rail, and express bus service in Puget Sound.

Sound Transit currently imposes the following taxes approved by voters after January 1, 2015, in addition to taxes approved prior to that date:

- 0.5 percent sales and use tax;
- 0.8 percent motor vehicle excise tax; and
- an annual \$0.25 per \$1,000 of assessed value property tax.

There is currently one county, Pierce County, within a RTA with a population of less than 1 million that contains a city with a population of more than 200,000.

**Summary of Bill:** Any taxes approved by RTA voters after January 1, 2015, are nullified and may not be imposed within the boundaries of any county within a regional transit

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authority with a population of less than 1 million that contains a city with a population of more than 200,000.

An RTA must defease any bond contracts that may impede implementing this section if the bond contracts include a defeasance option.

Any RTA taxes approved by voters after January 1, 2015, that have already been collected from within the boundaries of an affected county may be used only for issuing refunds to taxpayers within an affected county; or defeasing bond contracts that may impede implementation of this bill.

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Requested on January 24, 2020.

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

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

**Staff Summary of Public Testimony:** PRO: The Legislature ignores the implications of I-976 at its peril. The initiative was a powerful clarifying moment. Outside of King County, 976 passed overwhelmingly in Pierce and Snohomish Counties. My constituents voted for 976, they do not see the benefit of light rail in Pierce County. King County overwhelmingly supported light rail and voted against I-976. I think it makes sense that Pierce County leave the RTA district and allow King County to build light rail. I think we should allow Pierce County to spend the \$5 billion in ST3 taxes to build a transportation system that makes sense for Pierce County. My children were the ones that encouraged me is coming here today to speak out about Sound Transit. My son in Seattle pays an outrageous amount of money on his little teeny car that he uses to get back and forth from work. The reason he does not use transit is because he works at odd hours, and quite frankly, standing in a bus stop at two o'clock in the morning in the city of Seattle causes some concern for him for his own safety. I do not mind paying a reasonable amount but using outmoded schedules and pretending that that is how we should go forward in this world is irresponsible. ST1 and ST2 are both still in the red, and that is a good reason why taxpayers would vote for I-976. My children will be lucky to ride light rail. I know my wife and I will not because it will not be built down into Pierce County by the time we are passed away. It is a bit frustrating to have my pocket picked to pay for something I will never benefit from. I ask you to honor the people's voice who clearly understood what the initiative was really about and that is why I support this bill. Sound Transit is like the biggest bully on the playground. I have never seen a government that is able to wield such power. For them to do as Senator King pointed out, and come down here and say we want \$15 billion worth of authority, and snooker you guys into giving him that much authority, and then them turning around and making it \$54 billion. Then going to voters and saying your car tabs will go to about \$80, but then everybody is getting bills where it is \$300, \$500, \$800, \$1,000, or more. Senator O'Ban's bill says let Pierce County out. Let us all out, not just the people of Pierce County—everybody.

CON: Our concerns as a city of Everett are that we are part of a region and an economic structure that is dependent on transportation. I think it is important to note that the City of

Everett and Snohomish county voted for ST3. Wage analysis of climate reduction measures in Puget Sound region counties shows that local and regional projects to create clean and robust transit that reduces vehicle miles traveled is expected to have twice the impact on greenhouse gas emissions compared to a strong clean fuels program such as the one we hope will pass this session. We could basically undo the clean fuels work today, or a big chunk of it, by slowing down Sound Transit.

OTHER: As you know, Pierce County was the only county in the Sound Transit taxing district to oppose the Sound Transit 3 ballot measure in 2016 and overwhelmingly supported Initiative 976, which cut those same taxes. If Pierce County residents do not want light rail it should not be forced upon them. The bill could ultimately be a win-win for Pierce and King counties as King County residents who do want light rail are politically frustrated with opposition from outside counties who do not agree there is enough of a public benefit to support such a measure. Given King County's desire to opt out of the effects of measures like Initiative 976, which reduced funding for light rail, there should be a consensus between the two counties to allow Pierce County to opt out of ST3.

**Persons Testifying:** PRO: Senator Steve O'Ban, Prime Sponsor; Zachary Kinneman, citizen; Jon Higley, Pierce County Planning Commissioner - District 2; Tim Eyman, citizen.

CON: Paul Roberts, Sound Transit Board Member; Peter Rogoff; Alice Lockhart, 350 Seattle.

OTHER: Mariya Frost, Washington Policy Center.

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