

HOUSE BILL REPORT

EHB 1782

As Passed House:

March 2, 2023

Title: An act relating to the operating and maintenance deficit of the Wahkiakum county ferry.

Brief Description: Addressing the operating and maintenance deficit of the Wahkiakum county ferry.

Sponsors: Representatives McEntire and Fey.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Transportation: 2/15/23, 2/23/23 [DP].

Floor Activity:

Passed House: 3/2/23, 96-0.

Brief Summary of Engrossed Bill

- Increases state support of the Wahkiakum county ferry service to 85 percent of the operating deficit.
- Removes the restriction that reimbursement may not exceed amounts appropriated for the biennium.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 28 members: Representatives Fey, Chair; Donaghy, Vice Chair; Timmons, Vice Chair; Barkis, Ranking Minority Member; Hutchins, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Low, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Robertson, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Berry, Bronoske, Chapman, Cortes, Dent, Doglio, Duerr, Entenman, Goehner, Griffey, Hackney, Klicker, Mena, Orcutt, Ramel, Ramos, Schmidt, Taylor, Volz, Walsh and Wylie.

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

Staff: Beth Redfield (786-7140).

Background:

Any county may construct, operate and maintain ferries within the county or between counties. For counties operating ferry service under this general authority, the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) may reimburse for a portion of the deficit incurred while operating a county ferry service. Currently Pierce, Skagit, Wahkiakum, and Whatcom counties operate ferries under this general authority.

For Wahkiakum County's ferry service, the WSDOT is authorized to enter into a continuing agreement to pay for 80 percent of the operating deficit for the preceding fiscal year of the ferry service, with a maximum not to exceed the amount appropriated for the biennium. Funds must be used for the operation and maintenance of the Puget Island ferry. Fares established by the county must be comparable to those on similar runs listed on the state ferry schedule.

When the Legislature originally established state support for the Wahkiakum County ferry, it found that the Wahkiakum County ferry provides services which are primarily local in nature with secondary benefits to the state highway system in providing a bypass for State Route 4 and providing the only crossing of the Columbia River between the Astoria-Megler Bridge and the Longview Bridge.

Summary of Engrossed Bill:

The continuing agreement between the WSDOT and Wahkiakum County must provide for payment of 85 percent of the operating deficit of the county's ferry service. The restriction that reimbursement may not exceed amounts appropriated for the biennium is removed.

The legislative findings state that the Wahkiakum County ferry provides an important transportation bypass for State Route 4 and provides the only crossing of the Columbia River between the Astoria-Megler Bridge and the Longview Bridge.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) Picture in your mind the state of Washington and go as far as south and west as you can. That southwest corner of the state is where this ferry operates. It is important not

just to the community but also for the state. There are two large bridges that span the Columbia River, the Astoria Bridge and the Rainier Bridge that crosses from Longview. Between those two bridges there are thousands of people who live there and great cliffs along State Route 4, where it is pretty common for landslides to block one or both ways out, making it is impossible to get to either bridge. This ferry is not only used daily for work by Oregon and Washington citizens but is also a matter of safety. People need to be able to get out when medical or other emergencies come up.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Representative Joel McEntire, prime sponsor.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.