

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5248

As of February 6, 2025

Title: An act relating to creating a work group to make recommendations concerning bridge collisions by large commercial vessels.

Brief Description: Creating a work group to make recommendations concerning bridge collisions by large commercial vessels.

Sponsors: Senators Wilson, J. and Liias.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Transportation: 2/06/25.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Creates the Vessel Bridge Collision Work Group to review the impact resistance of Washington State bridges and make recommendations to reduce collisions and lessen their impacts.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION

Staff: Daniel Masterson (786-7454)

Background: Francis Scott Key Bridge Collapse. On Tuesday, March 26, 2024, the container ship Dali struck a pier of the Francis Scott Key Bridge across the Patapsco River in Baltimore, Maryland at about 1:30 am. The main bridge spans and the three nearest northeast approach spans collapsed shortly after the collision. Six members of a maintenance crew working on the roadway were killed and two more were rescued from the river. One of the pilots aboard the Dali requested that traffic be stopped from crossing the bridge minutes before the collision. Officers closed the bridge within about one minute of being dispatched, but the bridge collapsed just as traffic was stopped on the north side.

Columbia River Bridge Maintenance. Washington and Oregon have agreements to share

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maintenance costs for the bridges between the two states over the Columbia River. Depending on the bridge, maintenance is either managed by the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) or Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT).

Pilotage Organizations. The Washington State Board of Pilotage Commissioners (Board of Pilotage) develops and proposes statutory language for legislative adoption to ensure safe and compulsory pilotage, adopts rules to administer state pilotage laws, and enforces pilot and public adherence to the Pilotage Act, which may include discipline or prosecution of violators, or both. The Board of Pilotage also administers testing, training and licensing of marine pilots, and establishes standards for reporting and investigating incidents involving state-piloted vessels.

Columbia River Pilots are licensed to pilot over 320 nautical miles of the Columbia River from Astoria to the Ports of Longview, Kalama, Vancouver, Portland, The Dalles and Pasco.

Puget Sound Pilots members are licensed vessel captains who board oil tankers, cargo vessels and cruise ships to guide them through Puget Sound waters.

Washington State Emergency Management Division. The Washington Emergency Management Division (EMD) manages the State Emergency Operations Center, which is designated as the state's central location for information gathering, disaster analysis, and response coordination.

Summary of Bill: The Vessel Bridge Collision Work Group (Work Group) is created, composed of the following members:

- a representative of the Washington State Department of Transportation, who shall chair the Work Group;
- a representative of ODOT;
- a representative of Columbia River Pilots;
- a representative of Puget Sound Pilots;
- a representative of the Board of Pilotage;
- a representative of the United States Coast Guard;
- a representative of the United States Army Corps of Engineers;
- a representative of EMD specializing in emergency planning; and
- a representative of local government specializing in emergency planning.

The Work Group shall review the impact resistance of Washington State bridges that might be vulnerable to large commercial vessel collisions. "Large commercial vessels" means vessels that carry cargo or passengers for a fee and are more than 1300 gross international tons or exceed 200 feet in overall length.

The Work Group must report to the transportation committees of the Legislature by July 1, 2026, with their recommendations regarding how to both reduce collisions and lessen the impacts of collisions. The recommendations must include near, medium, and long-term

recommendations, and the estimated costs of each recommendation.

WSDOT and EMD shall jointly provide staff support for coordinating and administering the Work Group and technical assistance as requested by Work Group members. Consultants may be hired to assist with the efforts of the Work Group as resources allow.

Nonlegislative members of the Work Group are not entitled to be reimbursed for travel expenses if they are elected officials or are participating on behalf of an employer, governmental entity, or other organization. Any reimbursement for other nonlegislative members is subject to statute.

The Work Group expires December 31, 2026.

Appropriation: None.

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: It's unfortunate when bridges become the subject of our attention after a horrific tragedy that we all witnessed in Baltimore. Are we prepared enough with planning for collisions that could happen with large vessels and our bridges? On the Columbia River, the ships don't get smaller, just larger. This is a problem that does not seem to be going away. This bill provides the opportunity for so many voices to be heard on this work group. This bill is a good value to get this study going versus the \$6 million in projects from the work session. Either way we can't afford to have a plan.

We agree that a work group of key stakeholders focusing on bridge vulnerabilities is a timely and necessary first step to identifying and addressing exposures which could have catastrophic impacts. As a designated work group member, a Puget Sound Pilot would help the work group to better understand bridge vulnerabilities from the maritime point of view, as well as to understand the vessel types and maneuvering capabilities. The collision between the MV Dali and the Key Bridge has shined a spotlight on every port district to assess and identify mitigation strategies to harden vulnerable infrastructure reduce exposure and plan for contingencies. The United States Coast Guard conducted a board of inquiry after the Key Bridge collapse of ten regions including the Puget Sound. That was to discuss the risks to critical infrastructure in the vicinity of the Seattle-Tacoma area. The results will aid the work group.

I would like to suggest an amendment, to replace all instances of collision with collision to more accurately reflect the type of situation envisioned in this bill. Earlier today I sent a letter from a variety of different groups asking for an addition to the bill if it was to move

forward to make sure that it includes vessel agents and owners along with maritime safety exchange groups that are both in the Puget Sound and the Columbia River. We believe that the addition of these groups will make for a more well-rounded discussion as well as more comprehensive and practical solutions to avoid future allisions.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator Jeff Wilson, Prime Sponsor; Scott Brewen, Puget Sound Pilots; Matt Hannuksela, Puget Sound Pilots; Amber Carter, Columbia River Steamship Operators Assn..

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