

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1617

As Reported By House Committee On:
Transportation

Title: An act relating to high-speed ground transportation.

Brief Description: Planning high-speed ground transportation.

Sponsors: Representatives R. Fisher, Chandler, Schmidt, Eide, Johanson, J. Kohl, Kremen, Cothorn, Jacobsen, Brough, Pruitt, Thomas, R. Meyers, Miller, Shin, Karahalios, Locke, Finkbeiner, Ogden, Quall, Orr, Wineberry, Voloria, Wood, H. Myers, L. Johnson and Anderson.

Brief History:

Reported by House Committee on:
Transportation, February 17, 1993, DPA.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION

Majority Report: Do pass as amended. Signed by 23 members: Representatives R. Fisher, Chair; Brown, Vice Chair; Jones, Vice Chair; Schmidt, Ranking Minority Member; Mielke, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Brough; Brumsickle; Cothorn; Eide; Forner; Hansen; Heavey; Horn; Johanson; R. Meyers; Miller; Orr; Patterson; Quall; Sheldon; Shin; Wood; and Zellinsky.

Staff: Gene Baxstrom (786-7303).

Background: High speed rail systems have been employed in many countries as a means to address transportation needs. In several states, as highway and airport facilities become increasingly congested and as the costs of adding capacity escalate, high speed rail systems are being evaluated as an alternative mode.

The 1991 Legislature directed that a study be undertaken to evaluate the feasibility of a high speed ground transportation system in Washington state capable of providing service at speeds of at least 150 miles per hour. The study was to address the economic feasibility of developing such a system, as well as land use and economic development impacts, the necessary institutional structure to develop such a system, and system financing.

The study was guided by a 23-member steering committee made up of local elected officials, industry representatives, appointed state officials and citizen participants. The legislation created an Office of High Speed Ground Transportation in the Department of Transportation to provide staff support and authorized use of consultants when appropriate.

The study concluded in an October 1992 report that a high speed rail system was feasible in Washington. The report recognized that a system connecting Vancouver, B.C. and Portland, Oregon and Seattle and Spokane required a significant resource commitment in the range of \$14 to \$20 billion, in 1992 dollars. Thus, the report recommended incremental upgrading of existing rail service while the long range high speed rail passenger plan is developed. The report recommended that the state adopt goals for improved rail passenger service in certain corridors, including achieving 150-mile-per-hour service between Everett and Portland by the year 2020, with intermediate goals established; Everett and Vancouver, B.C. by 2025; and Seattle and Spokane by 2030.

Summary of Amended Bill: A program to begin implementation of a high speed ground transportation system in Washington is established. The program is to be implemented by the Department of Transportation in cooperation with the Utilities and Transportation Commission and affected cities and counties. The department is directed to incrementally upgrade existing rail passenger services through depot improvements, grade crossing and track improvements, and service enhancements. Local support for intercity rail service is encouraged, as are intermodal considerations.

The department is to develop a long range rail passenger plan through the conduct of studies to refine ridership estimates, corridor location and environmental analyses; station location assessments, coordination with state air transportation policy, and coordination with Oregon and British Columbia.

Amended Bill Compared to Original Bill: The \$2.5 million appropriation for plan development is deleted.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Effective Date of Amended Bill: The bill contains an emergency clause and takes effect on July 1, 1993.

Testimony For: Guidance will be provided by the Department of Transportation for development of a passenger rail program in Washington state.

Testimony Against: None.

Witnesses: Jim Toohey, Department of Transportation; Dale Jeremiah, Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers; and Lloyd Flem, Washington Association of Railroad Passengers.