

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SB 5572

As Reported By House Committee On:
Transportation

Title: An act relating to the identification of environmental costs for transportation projects.

Brief Description: Assessing environmental costs of transportation projects.

Sponsors: Senators Prentice, Vognild, Prince, Hargrove, Barr, McAuliffe, Haugen, Snyder, Pelz, Loveland, Sheldon, Moore, Erwin, Fraser, M. Rasmussen and Wojahn.

Brief History:

Reported by House Committee on:
Transportation, March 30, 1993, DP.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION

Majority Report: Do pass. 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; Finkbeiner; Forner; Fuhrman; Hansen; Heavey; Horn; J. Kohl; Miller; H. Myers; Quall; Sheldon; Shin; Wood; and Zellinsky.

Staff: Robin Rettew (786-7306).

Background: The Department of Transportation (DOT) does not generally track environmental costs related to construction projects. Examples of such costs include, but are not limited to: wetland mitigation; habitat protection; removal of fish passage barriers; design, construction, and maintenance of stormwater facilities; and disposal of hazardous wastes.

Without knowing what these costs are, it is difficult to provide accurate project cost estimates. For example, category C project cost estimates increased 20 percent between May 1990 and June 1991, in large part because of unforeseen environmental impacts.

One of the most significant sources of construction cost increases is related to the delays associated with permitting. Although these delays are not precisely tracked

today, the DOT estimates that it takes twice as long today to obtain permits as it did two years ago. The associated inflation cost of these delays is approximately \$13 million per year.

Without knowing how much is spent for the environmental components of construction projects, it is difficult to assess the costs and benefits of providing transportation facilities and services.

Summary of Bill: The DOT is authorized to undertake a pilot program to assess the costs of environmental elements of a representative sampling of transportation projects in at least one transportation district. The department will also track the cost impacts resulting from delays associated with permitting requirements.

The DOT is directed to expand its current scoping process used for the representative sampling of projects, to include detailed environmental analysis and preliminary design. Following these efforts, the department must then present project-specific recommendations and cost estimates to the Transportation Commission before approval is granted by the commission for actual construction.

Based upon the findings of the pilot program, the Transportation Commission is directed to recommend policies to the Legislative Transportation Committee regarding: (1) the current practice of appropriating design and construction dollars simultaneously; (2) identification of reasonable thresholds for environmental costs; (3) budget and accounting modifications that may be warranted in order to accurately capture environmental costs associated with transportation projects; and (4) modifications to the priority array statutes.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Testimony For: Determining the environmental costs of transportation projects is important in order to evaluate both the transportation benefits and environmental costs associated with such projects. Conducting the pilot program should also provide an opportunity for reviewing how projects are initially scoped.

Further, establishing a data base will enable the department to respond to specific inquiries related to discrete environmental costs, and should enable the department to begin work with the departments of Ecology, Fisheries and

Wildlife in joint analyses regarding the actual mitigation costs incurred compared to the environmental and economic costs that might result without mitigation. Such dialogue between agencies may result in shared program efforts and shared costs in the future.

Testimony Against: None.

Witnesses: Ed Manary, Department of Fisheries; Duke Schaub, Associated General Contractors of Washington; Skip Burch, Department of Transportation; and Bruce Wishart, Sierra Club.