

HOUSE BILL REPORT

EHB 2734

As Passed House:
February 13, 1998

Title: An act relating to additional state ferry vessels.

Brief Description: Authorizing additional state ferry vessels.

Sponsors: Representatives Huff, Lantz, Zellinsky, K. Schmidt, Johnson, Gardner, Constantine, Eickmeyer, Chopp and Poulsen.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Transportation Policy & Budget: 2/4/98, 2/9/98 [DP].

Floor Activity:

Passed House: 2/13/98, 86-11.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION POLICY & BUDGET

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 25 members: Representatives K. Schmidt, Chairman; Hankins, Vice Chairman; Mielke, Vice Chairman; Mitchell, Vice Chairman; Fisher, Ranking Minority Member; Cooper, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Backlund; Buck; Cairnes; Chandler; Constantine; DeBolt; Gardner; Hatfield; Johnson; Murray; O'Brien; Ogden; Radcliff; Romero; Scott; Skinner; Sterk; Wood and Zellinsky.

Staff: Vicki Fabre (786-7313).

Background: Passenger-only ferry service first began in 1986 with service from Seattle to Bremerton. Expanded service to Bremerton and Vashon Island began in 1990.

A 1989 study conducted by the Puget Sound Council of Governments reviewed cross-sound travel through the year 2020 and identified the Southworth/Seattle and the Kingston/Seattle passenger-only ferry routes as promising, based on criteria evaluating cost effectiveness, time savings, non-duplication of service, and ability to relieve congestion. The ridership analysis for these routes showed that an expanded passenger-only ferry program could serve as a transportation demand management measure, changing travel behavior from use of the single-occupant vehicle to high occupancy passenger vessels.

It is predicted that a Seattle/Kingston passenger-only ferry route would reduce congestion on the Seattle/Bainbridge and Edmonds/Kingston route, as well as traffic demand in the State Route (SR) 305 corridor. Direct passenger-only service from Southworth to Seattle would reduce congestion on the Fauntleroy/Vashon/Southworth route and reduce traffic demand on the SR 16/I-5 corridor.

In 1993 the Department of Transportation (DOT) developed an implementation plan for expanded passenger-only service and has initiated the design and permitting processes for terminals at both Southworth and Kitsap and improvements at Seattle.

Four new passenger-only vessels would bring the total fleet of fast, low-wake vessels to six and allow Washington State Ferries to deliver the program identified in the Passenger-Only Implementation Plan of 1993. Two 350-passenger, low-wake, high-speed (30 knots) vessels each would serve Seattle/Southworth and Seattle/Kingston, allow 30- to 35-minute crossings, and departures every 45 minutes during the peak periods.

The long-range travel demand for trips from central and north Kitsap Peninsula to the Seattle and Edmonds mainland ferry terminal indicate a 122% forecast increase in peak travel demand over the next 20 years. To meeting the forecasted citizen travel demands DOT must provide reliable vessel operations that cannot be maintained by the aging super class ferrie. Proponents for additional service contend that a new jumbo class mark II ferry would provide such reliable service.

Summary of Bill: Legislative intent regarding the need to construct additional passenger-only ferries and supporting terminals to serve the Southworth/Seattle and Kingston/Seattle routes and a more reliable vessel to replace existing super class ferries is declared.

The DOT is authorized to construct a maximum of four passenger-only ferry vessels with technology that will respond to the service demands of a Southworth/Seattle and Kingston/Seattle route necessary terminal and docking facilities and a jumbo class mark II ferry similar to those ferries in operation or under construction of this class.

The acquisition, procurement and construction of vessels and terminals must be carried out in accordance with existing competitive bid procedures using an Invitation For Bid (IFB) process which results in a contract award to the lowest responsible bidder, unless the secretary of the DOT determines in writing that the IFB is either not practicable or not advantageous to the state. If the latter occurs, the DOT is authorized to use a competitive Request For Proposal (RFP) procurement process that would allow evaluation of technical and performance factors (such as maintainability, reliability, commonality, cost of spare parts, etc.) in addition to price.

The DOT's authority to construct new vessels and terminals is contingent on an appropriation in the 1998 transportation budget or an omnibus appropriations bill.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: The bill contains an emergency clause and takes effect immediately. However, the bill is null and void if not funded in the budget.

Testimony For: Studies analyzing cross-sound travel through the year 2020 and various ridership analyses have identified the Southworth/Seattle and Kingston/Seattle ferry routes as the most promising, based on cost effectiveness, time savings, non-duplication of service and ability to relieve congestion. New, fast, low-wake, 350-passenger ferries and the supporting docking and terminal facilities that provide additional ferry service for commuters in the south and central Puget Sound regions would reduce congestion in these high growth areas and provide an additional non-vehicle commuting option.

Testimony Against: Given current transportation budgetary constraints, the DOT should conduct a survey of the condition of the existing fleet to determine future vessel needs and priorities before making a long-term investment in new passenger-only ferries and supporting terminals.

Testified: Representative Tom Huff, prime sponsor (pro); Representative Pat Lantz, secondary sponsor (pro); Tom Waggoner, Kingston Chamber of Commerce (pro); Sonny Woodward, Kingston Chamber of Commerce (pro); Joe Martinac, Martinac Shipbuilding Corporation (con); Shela Stickel, Sound Transportation Coalition (pro); Sandy Barrett, ferry commuter (pro); Joe Daniels, Puget Sound District Council (pro); Jack Leengren, Clinton Ferry Advisory Committee (pro); and Paul Green, Washington State Ferries (pro).