

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 2180

As Reported By House Committee On:

Transportation Policy & Budget

Title: An act relating to the establishment of a state policy and program for freight mobility strategic investments.

Brief Description: Establishing a state policy and program for freight mobility strategic investments.

Sponsors: Representatives K. Schmidt, Radcliff, Mitchell, O'Brien and Robertson.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Transportation Policy & Budget: 3/6/97 [DPS].

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION POLICY & BUDGET

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 24 members: Representatives K. Schmidt, Chairman; Hankins, Vice Chairman; Mielke, Vice Chairman; Mitchell, Vice Chairman; Fisher, Ranking Minority Member; Blalock, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Cooper, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Backlund; Buck; Cairnes; Chandler; Constantine; DeBolt; Gardner; Hatfield; Johnson; O'Brien; Radcliff; Romero; Scott; Skinner; Sterk; Wood and Zellinsky.

Staff: Jeff Doyle (786-7322).

Background: During the 1996 interim, the Legislative Transportation Committee (LTC) appointed the Freight Mobility Advisory Committee (FMAC) to analyze the state's freight mobility needs, identify high-priority freight transportation projects, and make policy recommendations to the Legislature.

One of the key recommendations from the FMAC was that the state take the lead in establishing a freight transportation program that would forge funding partnerships between the state, counties, cities, ports and private industry for transportation improvements along strategic freight corridors.

Summary of Substitute Bill: A new program is created within the Department of Transportation (DOT) to review, evaluate and propose funding for freight transportation projects that are of strategic importance to the state.

To be eligible for this program, a proposed project must be located within one of the strategic freight corridors in the state. A strategic corridor is a transportation route that has great economic importance within an integrated freight system. The criteria for such a corridor is based upon freight tonnages, values, etc. The DOT is directed to collect data and update the list of designated strategic freight corridors at least once every two years. Proposed projects must also meet other eligibility criteria, such as: (1) improving intermodal or port access; (2) alleviating a rail/road conflict; or (3) improving the capacity or condition of roadways or waterways specifically used for freight transportation.

The Freight Mobility Strategic Investment Board (FMSIB) is created to provide oversight, direction and review for the program to ensure that the state's freight mobility policy is carried out. The board is comprised of representatives of cities, counties, ports, the DOT, majority and minority party legislators, and the private transportation industry (railroads and trucking).

With the assistance of DOT staff, proposed projects will be screened by the FMSIB and prioritized, based on specific criteria such as the level of financial commitment by other partners, the degree to which congestion in the delivery of freight is reduced, and the reduction of adverse transportation impacts on affected communities. The board will recommend a portfolio of the highest rated projects to the Legislature for funding.

A new freight mobility strategic investment account is created within the transportation fund. Moneys in the account may be used as grants, loans, finance guarantees, or the repayment of principal and interest on the sale of bonds for projects selected for funding.

Funds from the account may be used only for those elements of a project that directly contribute to improving freight mobility, and may not be used on other project elements such as bike paths, landscape or roadside beautification. Once funds have been allocated for an approved project, the other funding partners will bear the financial cost if the project is enhanced beyond the original scope.

Until June 1998, when the program will be in full effect, the Transportation Improvement Board and the County Road Administration Board are each encouraged to give special funding consideration to projects that eliminate, reduce or mitigate the impacts of freight at public, at-grade rail crossings.

The state interest component of the statewide multimodal transportation plan shall include a freight mobility plan that assesses the state's freight transportation needs. Ports are also encouraged to submit their development plans to the regional transportation planning organization, the metropolitan planning organization, the DOT, the cities and the counties to better coordinate the development and funding of freight transportation projects.

Finally, the LTC is directed to review and analyze freight transportation issues affecting Eastern and Southeastern Washington and report back to the Legislature by January 15, 1998. This effort would, among other things, analyze the impacts of increased freight rail through communities such as Yakima, Richland, Kennewick and Pasco.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill: The title-only placeholder language is replaced with substantive law, as described in the summary of substitute bill.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Effective Date of Substitute Bill: The bill contains an emergency clause and takes effect immediately.

Testimony For: The state needs to take the leadership in promoting freight mobility improvements. All funding partners--the state, cities, counties, ports and private transportation providers--stand to benefit from this program as funds can be combined and used for maximum benefit.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: Lisa Clausen, city of Auburn; and Eric Berger, County Road Administration Board.