

HOUSE BILL REPORT

ESB 6325

As Passed House:

March 5, 1998

Title: An act relating to additional state ferry vessels.

Brief Description: Authorizing additional state ferry vessels.

Sponsors: Senators Oke, B. Sheldon and T. Sheldon.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Transportation Policy & Budget: 2/23/98, 2/26/98 [DP].

Floor Activity:

Passed House: 3/5/98, 88-9.

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; Constantine; DeBolt; Gardner; Hatfield; Johnson; McCune; Murray; O'Brien; Ogden; Radcliff; Robertson; 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 on the 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 and allow 30-35 minute crossings and departures every 45 minutes during the peak periods.

Summary of Bill: Legislative intent to construct additional passenger-only ferries and supporting terminals to serve the Southworth/Seattle and Kingston/Seattle routes 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 and the necessary terminal and docking facilities.

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 allows evaluation of technical and performance factors (such as maintainability, reliability, commonality, cost of spare parts, etc.) in addition to price.

DOT's authority to construct new vessels and terminals is contingent on an appropriation in the 1998 transportation budget or an omnibus appropriations bill. The appropriation must not reduce the current level of funding for the maintenance and repair of vessels and terminals in service.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed. However, the bill is null and void unless 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, prior to making a long-term investment in passenger-only ferries and supporting terminals, the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Committee should contract with the American Bureau of Shipping to conduct a survey of the condition of the existing fleet to determine future vessel needs and priorities.

Testified: Senator Bob Oke, prime sponsor (pro); Sheila Stickel, Sound Transportation Coalition (pro); Joe Daniels, Puget Sound District Council (pro); Jonathon Platt, JM Martiniac Shipbuilding (con); and Dan Sexton, Washington State Building Trades and Construction Council/Washington State Labor Council (pro).