

SENATE BILL REPORT

SHB 2180

As Reported By Senate Committee On:
Transportation, April 3, 1997

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: House Committee on Transportation Policy & Budget (originally sponsored by Representatives K. Schmidt, Radcliff, Mitchell, O'Brien and Robertson).

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Transportation: 4/2/97, 4/3/97 [DPA, DNPA].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION

Majority Report: Do pass as amended.

Signed by Senators Prince, Chair; Wood, Vice Chair; Goings, Haugen, Horn, Jacobsen, Morton, Oke, Patterson and Rasmussen.

Minority Report: Do not pass as amended.

Signed by Senator Heavey.

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 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 Amended 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. 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, DOT, the Transportation Commission, majority and minority party legislators, and the private transportation industry (railroads and trucking).

With the assistance of DOT staff, proposed projects are screened by 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 recommends a portfolio of the highest rated projects to the Transportation Commission and 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 bear the financial cost if the project is enhanced beyond the original scope.

Until June 1998, when the program is 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 must 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, DOT, the cities and the counties to better coordinate the development and funding of freight transportation projects.

Finally, LTC is directed to review and analyze freight transportation issues affecting eastern and southeastern Washington and report back to the Legislature by November 1, 1997. This effort would, among other things, analyze the impacts of increased freight rail through communities such as Yakima, Richland, Kennewick and Pasco.

Amended Bill Compared to Substitute Bill: Legislators serving on the board will be nonvoting. Two Transportation Commission members are added to the board. Private entities cannot serve as lead project proponents. The board is no longer authorized to hire a professional administrator. The board must endeavor to select projects from all geographic regions of the state. The eastern Washington transportation study is clarified and must be completed by November 1, 1997. The emergency clause is removed.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

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

Testimony For: This legislation represents a partnership approach between the state, cities, counties, ports and private industry to solve freight transportation problems in the state, especially grade separations.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: PRO: Representative Karen Schmidt; Representative Ruth Fisher; Pat Jones, WA Ports Association; Paula Hammond, WSDOT.