

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5816

As of February 26, 1997

Title: An act relating to regional transportation authorities.

Brief Description: Modifying the powers and duties of regional transportation authorities.

Sponsors: Senators McDonald, Heavey, Johnson, Rossi, Roach, Schow, Horn, Finkbeiner, Strannigan and Benton.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Transportation: 2/26/97.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION

Staff: Gene Baxstrom (786-7303)

Background: Regional transit authorities are special purpose governments authorized to provide high capacity transportation services in the state's most populous counties. An authority must contain portions of at least two contiguous counties having a population of at least 400,000 persons. County legislative authority's must approve portions of a county being included in such an authority. Governance is provided by a board of local elected officials appointed by respective county executives, with one official for each 145,000 of population within the authority boundaries from each county. Financing for an authority is through voter approved sales, motor vehicle excise, and employer taxes.

In 1993, King, Pierce and Snohomish counties approved formation of, and participation in, a regional transit authority. That authority initially developed a high capacity transportation system plan which was turned down by voters in March 1995. A different plan, the Ten-Year Regional Transit System Plan, was approved by voters in November 1996.

Summary of Bill: A regional transit authority's powers are limited to coordination, planning, implementation, funding and contracting for transportation services. Its authority to operate and maintain high capacity systems is repealed.

The Regional Transit Authority's powers in certain areas are tied to the Ten-Year System Plan approved by the voters in November 1996. Local tax revenues must be used to benefit those subareas where they are generated. This requirement also applies to future phases authorized by the voters. Work must begin simultaneously in all subareas so benefits are to be realized throughout the region. The entire system is to be completed by December 31, 2007, and taxes must be rolled back to a level sufficient to pay off only the portion operational on that date. Authority for bonding and local improvement district authorization are amended to acknowledge this requirement. An authority may not enter into binding agreements or dictate policies regarding state funded facilities such as high occupancy vehicles lanes.

The governing authority for regional transit authorities is changed from one based on one appointed representative from each of King, Pierce, and Snohomish counties for each 145,000 persons residing within that portion of the county within the authority boundaries to two members from each of the five sub-areas identified in the system plan. The new board is specified to have ten members as opposed to the allowance for the existing 18 member board, up to a 25-member board. Provisions for reconstituting the board periodically on the basis of boundary or population changes are deleted.

Major decisions of the authority, which currently require a two-thirds majority vote, also require review and approval of each of the legislative bodies of counties within an authority's boundaries. Major decisions currently are system plan adoption and amendment, system phasing decision, budget adoption, annexations, board composition changes, and executive director employment. Use by the authority of any transportation facilities and properties owned by another public transit agency requires the approval of the county legislative authority within which the transit agency is located.

Taxes from areas annexed may be used only for facilities and services with that subarea.

Provisions prohibiting others from operating high capacity services within the authority boundaries without the authority's approval are repealed. The requirement for the authority to honor existing labor contracts of systems acquired is repealed.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

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