

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 6208

As Reported By Senate Committee On:
Environmental Quality & Water Resources, January 21, 2000

Title: An act relating to providing incentives to reduce air pollution through the use of clean-fuel vehicles.

Brief Description: Extending the use of high occupancy vehicle lanes to clean-fuel vehicles.

Sponsors: Senators Fraser, Jacobsen, Kohl-Welles and Kline.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Environmental Quality & Water Resources: 1/11/2000, 1/21/2000 [DPS-TRAN].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY & WATER RESOURCES

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Bill No. 6208 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass and be referred to Committee on Transportation.

Signed by Senators Fraser, Chair; Eide, Vice Chair; Jacobsen, Morton and Swecker.

Staff: Richard Rodger (786-7461)

Background: Several federal laws have sought to encourage the public to reduce air pollution from vehicles through the purchase of low-emission vehicles. One of the nonmonetary incentives contained in federal law is to allow low-emission vehicles to operate in the high occupancy vehicle (HOV) lanes with only one occupant as long as these vehicles do not contribute to traffic congestion.

Presently there are no known vehicles operating in the state that meet the federal low-emission standards. It is projected that there may be 50 vehicles by the year 2002, and perhaps 100-150 per year thereafter.

Summary of Substitute Bill: The Department of Licensing may issue special low-emission– license plates to passenger vehicles that are federally certified as inherently low-emission, ultra-low emission or zero-emission vehicles.

The Department of Transportation (DOT) and the local authorities, in consultation with the Department of Ecology, may allow properly certified and licensed low-emission vehicles to operate in the HOV lanes with only one occupant. Single occupant inherently low-emission fleet vehicles must be authorized to operate in the HOV lanes in federally designated nonattainment air pollution areas. Fleet vehicles are defined by federal law to mean the owner has at least ten motor vehicles.

DOT may remove or restore low-emission vehicle access to any HOV lane if the vehicles are a cause of significant congestion.

If a low-emission vehicle fails an emission test, the Department of Licensing must revoke the special low-emission designation and the owner must return the special license plates within 15 days.

The Department of Ecology must evaluate the act's effectiveness in improving air quality, its impact on traffic flows, and make recommendations to the Legislature by December 15, 2004. The act expires on June 30, 2005.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill: The original bill was not considered.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on January 10, 2000.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect on January 1, 2001.

Testimony For: We support the concept and creation of incentives to encourage the purchase of low-emission vehicles without significant cost to the state. The Department of Ecology can conduct the required evaluation if the vehicles have special license plates as required in the bill.

Testimony Against: The bill is not needed because DOT has the authority under existing law to allow these vehicles in the HOV lanes. DOT should have the authority to remove or restore these class of vehicles to the HOV lanes, not the Governor. The requirement of DOL to cancel the license plates for vehicles that fail an emission test will invoke administrative procedures for owners.

Testified: (Pro with some concerns) Toby Rickman, Department of Transportation; Lynda Henriksen, Department of Licensing; Mary Berg, Department of Ecology.