
Transportation Committee

HB 2736

Brief Description: Streamlining transportation governance.

Sponsors: Representatives Murray, Simpson, G., Dickerson, Rockefeller and Wood.

Brief Summary of Bill

- The Secretary of the Department of Transportation will be appointed by the Governor.
- Moves all Transportation Commission functions to the Department of Transportation.
- Enhances the public outreach, strategic planning and policy recommendation role of the Transportation Commission.

Hearing Date: 1/22/04

Staff: Jeff Doyle (786-7322).

Background:

The Legislature created the Transportation Commission in 1977 to govern the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT). The seven-member commission appoints the Secretary of Transportation, proposes transportation legislation and budgets, approves the issuance of bonds for highways, and establishes the policies of the WSDOT in coordinating transportation planning and administering grants to cities and counties. The Commission has authority to determine ferry fares, tolls, and other charges for use of the transportation system. The Commission is also responsible for development of a state transportation policy plan (20-year plan) that addresses all modes of transportation. Finally, the Commission is tasked with developing transportation system benchmarks under SHB 2304, enacted during the 2002 session.

In 1998, the Blue Ribbon Commission on Transportation (BRCT) was formed to analyze the state's transportation system and to make recommendations for reform and improvement. The BRCT found that in Washington, more than 468 governmental entities have authority for transportation planning, funding, management and construction of the system. They recommended that a single point of accountability for the state system be designated. To accomplish this, the BRCT recommended that the Secretary of the WSDOT be appointed directly by the Governor, thus making the Governor accountable for the performance of the state transportation system.

The BRCT also recommended that the mission of the state Transportation Commission be modified to make the Commission responsible for benchmarking and performance measures for

the state transportation system. However, last session the legislature created the Transportation Performance Audit Board (TPAB) to conduct performance audits of transportation-related agencies. The Transportation Commission does not have a formal role in this performance audit process.

Summary of Bill:

The authority to appoint the Secretary of Transportation is given to the Governor. In selecting the Secretary of Transportation, the Governor must seek the advice and consent of the Transportation Commission. Appointment of the Secretary is subject to confirmation by the Senate. The Secretary serves at the pleasure of the Governor, and employment may be terminated with or without cause. Most powers currently residing with the Transportation Commission are delegated directly to the agency. The Commission no longer has operational oversight of the WSDOT. The Commission retains its responsibilities for developing the 20 year multimodal transportation vision and plan for the state. The Commission's public involvement and outreach role is enhanced. At least every five years, the Commission must convene regional transportation forums to involve transportation stakeholders and the public in the formulation of a vision and strategic plan for transportation. Input gathered from these activities must be incorporated into the Commission's 20-year planning process. The Commission is directed to issue biennial transportation progress reports to the legislature and the Governor. The reports will assess the state's multimodal transportation system, identifying progress toward attaining system-wide benchmarks and noting deficiencies in the system. The Commission will propose potential strategies, solutions and best practices to improve performance of the transportation system.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.