Washington State
House of Representatives

BILL ANALYSIS

Transportation Committee

HB 2923

Brief Description: Authorizing magnetic levitation transportation systems.

Sponsors: Representatives Ericksen, Dickerson, Sullivan, Nixon and Simpson, G..

Brief Summary of Bill

- Authorizing magnetic levitation transportation and personal rapid transit system pilots.
- Designates eight legislative members to work with counties to approve and implement pilot projects.
- Authorizes magnetic levitation technology transportation systems to use existing high capacity transportation local option funding sources and public private partnerships.

Hearing Date: 2/5/04

Staff: Jerry Long (786-7306).

Background:

In the early 1990's, high-capacity transportation (HTC) systems were authorized to offer public transportation services within an urbanized region operating on authorized exclusive right of ways along with the supporting services and facilities necessary to implement the system. The services are to provide a higher level of passenger capacity, speed and service frequency. Transit agencies which include city owned transit systems, county transportation authorities, metropolitan municipal corporations and public transportation benefit areas are responsible for planning, construction and operations. A planning process is outlined in statute.

Only those transit agencies in counties with a population of one hundred and seventy five thousand or more and has an interstate highway within its borders, except for any county having a population of more than 1 million or a county that has a population of more than 400 thousand and is adjacent to a county with a population of 1 million or more may operate a HTC system.

The HTC agencies may use the following dedicated voter approved funding sources: employer tax and sales and use tax.
These taxes are in addition to any federal, state, local and private sector assistance available.

The HTC systems are defined in statute as rapid rail system, monorail, trolley or other fixed rail guideway. Magnetic levitation and personal rapid transit, relatively new technology, is not in that definition.

Magnetic levitation (maglev) is an advanced technology in which magnetic force lifts, propels and guides a vehicle over a guideway speeds of 250 to 300 miles per hour. The guideway is the physical structure along which maglev vehicles are levitated. The concept of magnetically levitated trains was first identified at around 1900. The maglev technology was largely advanced in Germany and Japan particularly in the 1980s. Little research in the United States was performed until the 1990s when the National Maglev Initiative was established.

To evaluate the potential for maglev to improve intercity transportation and to determine an appropriate role for the federal government, the "Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century" (TEA 21) was passed in 1998, which created a National Magnetic Levitation Technology Deployment Program.

Summary of Bill:

Magnetic levitation and personal rapid transit systems are included in the definition of a high capacity transportation system. The magnetic levitation technology and personal rapid transit systems to use voter approved local option funding which includes the existing employer tax and sales and use tax in addition to any federal, state, local and private sector funding available. The counties are also authorized to use public-private partnerships.

The Legislature authorizes the implementation of pilot projects for magnetic levitation technology and personal rapid transportation systems within the existing planning requirements for other types of high capacity transportation systems. Eight legislative members, two from each legislative caucus to approve and work with counties in the implementation of pilot projects.

All counties are eligible to implement pilot projects.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect on July 1, 2004.