
Transportation Committee

HB 2925

Brief Description: Value pricing for limited access highway lanes.

Sponsors: Representatives Simpson, G., Wallace, Hankins, Cooper, Lovick and Hatfield.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Authorizes the Department of Transportation to develop and operated High Occupancy Toll (HOT) lanes.
- Allows conversion of High Occupancy Vehicle (HOV) lanes to HOT lanes only if an adjacent lane is also converted to a HOT lane.
- Requires standards that prevent deterioration of services for HOVs and HOT lane users.

Hearing Date: 1/26/04

Staff: Gene Baxstrom (786-7303).

Background:

High Occupancy Vehicle (HOV) lanes are highway lanes reserved part-time or full-time for vehicles carrying a minimum number of occupants. The object of these lanes is to facilitate the operation of transit vehicles and other multi-occupant vehicles, allowing them to avoid congestion and providing those vehicles with improved travel times. There are currently over 200 miles of HOV lanes in operation in the central Puget Sound area. During certain periods the HOV lanes are operating below capacity, while adjacent general purpose lanes are congested.

High Occupancy Toll (HOT) lanes are lanes that are open to carpools, vanpools transit vehicles, and toll-paying single occupant vehicles. The goal for establishing these lanes is to provide a higher level of service for multi-occupant vehicles, while permitting single occupant vehicles to use surplus capacity in the lane by paying a toll. The HOT lanes have been employed in several corridors in California.

The Transportation Commission has authority to designate HOV lanes on state highways. It does not, however, have the authority to designate HOT lanes and impose charges for the use of those lanes. The Transportation Commission as part of its evaluation of HOV lanes directed the Department of Transportation (DOT) to evaluate the feasibility of converting a portion of the HOV lane system to HOT lanes. The DOT staff identified a portion of State Route 167 as the best candidate to implement a HOT lane pilot project.

Summary of Bill:

The DOT is authorized to establish and operate HOT lanes. The DOT may convert existing HOV lanes to HOT lanes only when an adjacent lane will be operated as a HOT lane.

The DOT must establish a desirable miles per hour operating standard for all lanes of the highway facility. In no event may the operating speed for transit buses, carpools and single-occupant vehicles in the HOT lane be permitted to drop below 45 miles per hour. The tolls for the HOT lane must be varied by level of congestion with the highway to ensure the miles per hour operating standards in any HOV lane or HOT lane converted from an HOV lane is not degraded. Tolls may vary by time of day, level of traffic congestion, vehicle occupancy, and other criteria established by the DOT.

The DOT is to report annually to the Transportation Commission and the legislature on policies and effectiveness of HOT lanes.

Revenues from HOT lane tolls may only be used for transportation services within or connecting to that transportation corridor that maximizes the movement of people. Those toll revenues are to be deposited into a special account within the multimodal transportation fund.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on January 22, 2004.

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