

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5537

As Reported By Senate Committee On:
Highways & Transportation, February 27, 2003

Title: An act relating to transportation alternatives in central Puget Sound.

Brief Description: Requiring a revote on light rail and redirection of resources.

Sponsors: Senators Benton, Prentice, Esser, Rossi, Finkbeiner, Johnson, T. Sheldon, Roach and Stevens.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Highways & Transportation: 2/5/03, 2/27/03 [DPS, DNP].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HIGHWAYS & TRANSPORTATION

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Bill No. 5537 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass.

Signed by Senators Horn, Chair; Benton, Vice Chair; Swecker, Vice Chair; Esser, Finkbeiner, Mulliken and Prentice.

Minority Report: Do not pass.

Signed by Senators Haugen, Jacobsen, Kastama and Spanel.

Staff: Kelly Simpson (786-7403)

Background: The King, Pierce and Snohomish County Councils voted in 1993 to establish the Central Puget Sound Regional Transit Authority (now known as Sound Transit). Sound Transit is vested with high capacity transportation system development authority in the three county area, including the imposition of voter-approved taxes for development and operation of such transportation systems.

In 1996, voters in the urban areas of King, Pierce, and Snohomish counties approved a plan and authorized funding to provide high capacity transportation services for the Central Puget Sound Region.

Summary of Substitute Bill: A regional transit authority may not implement a light rail system in a county with a population over 1.5 million persons unless a measure providing funding for the light rail system is submitted to the voters and subsequently approved. If voters turn down the measure, a regional transit authority may only spend money on the light rail system to retire debt or honor contractual obligations, if any, relative to a light rail system.

A regional transit authority must assess its resources used to implement a light rail system in a county with a population over 1.5 million persons and then must determine the best alternative use of those resources. The alternative uses include: (1) a bus rapid transit

system; (2) expanded commuter rail service; (3) expanded bus or vanpool service; and (4) any other allowed service.

If the voters do not approve the expenditure of resources on the light rail system, a regional transit authority must direct those resources to the chosen alternatives.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill: The bill was redrafted to make the language more consistent with the language in the current chapter in the code regarding regional transit authorities. The provision requiring a regional transit authority to redirect light rail resources to a monorail project as an alternative to light rail was removed. A provision was added to permit a regional transit authority, in the event the voters turn down light rail, to spend money on light rail solely to retire debt or to fulfill outstanding contractual obligations, if any. Finally, a retroactivity clause was added.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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

Testimony For: Sound Transit has failed to honor the intention of the voters who in 1996 approved the original regional transit system plan. The agency has mismanaged funds, significantly altered the original transit plan as understood by the voters, and has failed to provide alternatives to the current light rail system that has seen cost overruns and a cutback in the length of its original route. Additionally, the current governance board is not directly accountable to Sound Transit voters.

Testimony Against: Sound Transit is operating in a financially sound and efficient manner. The agency continues to receive local voter support at the ballot. Although the agency had some management problems in the past, it has successfully addressed those issues. For example, the agency underwent six performance audits, its subarea equity provisions have never been violated, the project control system has been updated, a citizen oversight panel was created, the federal government continues to provide financial support to the agency, the Federal Transit Administration recently gave Sound Transit a favorable rating, its contractors are all from the private sector, and the agency's work has resulted in adding millions of dollars into the local economy. Legislation should not be enacted to impede Sound Transit's continued success.

Testified: Joni Eurl, Sound Transit (con); Brian Carpenter, Pierce Co. Bldg. Trades (con); John Littel, King Co. Bldg. Trades (con); Michael Kepcha (con); Rich Borkowski, People for Modern Transit (con); Pat Matteson, League of Women Voters (con); Maggi Fimia, Michael Godfried, Rich Harknes, Charles Horner, CETA & Puget Sd. Regional Monorail (pro); Emory Bundy, Sane Transit (pro); Guy Spencer, Normandy Pk. City Council (pro); Tom Heller (pro); John Dodd (pro); Rob McKenna, King County Council (pro); Dick Paylor and Tom Olsen, City of Bothell (pro); Paul Locke (pro).