

SENATE BILL REPORT

SSB 5584

As Passed Senate, March 19, 2003

Title: An act relating to dissolution of regional transit authorities.

Brief Description: Providing for dissolution of regional transit authorities.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Highways & Transportation (originally sponsored by Senators Swecker, Jacobsen, T. Sheldon, Morton, Deccio, Rossi and Sheahan).

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Highways & Transportation: 2/5/03, 2/27/03 [DPS, DNP].
Passed Senate: 3/19/03, 25-24.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HIGHWAYS & TRANSPORTATION

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Bill No. 5584 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass.

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

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 Bill: A regional transit authority may be dissolved by the voters residing within the authority area. A referendum petition to dissolve an authority must be filed with each county participating in the authority. After filing the petition, the petitioner must obtain signatures of at least 15 percent of the registered voters within the authority area to have the referendum placed on the ballot. If the necessary signatures are verified as valid, within 120 days after the signed petition was filed, the referendum for dissolution must be submitted to the voters at a general or special election.

If a regional transit authority is dissolved, the authority may only exist solely as a limited entity to oversee the collection of revenue and the payment of debt in effect, if any. Thirty days after the debt is paid, the authority must dissolve.

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: Paul Locke (pro); Rob McKenna, King County Council (pro); Maggi Fimia, Michael Godfried, Rich Harknes, Charles Horner, CETA & Puget Sd. Regional Monorail (pro); Pat Matteson, League of Women Voters (con); Joni Eurl, Sound Transit (con).