

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 6321

As Reported By Senate Committee On:
Highways & Transportation, February 9, 2004

Title: An act relating to the Puget Island ferry.

Brief Description: Authorizing toll-free operation of the Puget Island ferry during emergency bridge closures.

Sponsors: Senators Doumit and Haugen; by request of Department of Transportation.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Highways & Transportation: 2/9/04 [DPS].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HIGHWAYS & TRANSPORTATION

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Bill No. 6321 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass.

Signed by Senators Horn, Chair; Swecker, Vice Chair; Esser, Haugen, Jacobsen, Kastama, Mulliken, Murray, Oke, Poulsen and Spanel.

Staff: Tami Neilson (786-7452)

Background: The Puget Island-Westport ferry provides the only route for vehicles crossing the Columbia River between the Astoria-Meglar bridge and the Longview-Rainier bridge. Wahkiakum County runs the ferry.

Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) has entered into a continuing agreement with Wahkiakum County in which the WSDOT pays the county a monthly amount not to exceed 80 percent of the ferry's operating and maintenance deficit. These funds come out of the local program within WSDOT and are limited to the appropriated amount.

When State Route 4 between Cathlamet and Longview is closed due to actual or potential slide conditions, and there is no suitable, reasonably short alternate route provided, Wahkiakum County is authorized by statute to operate the Puget Island ferry on a toll-free basis during the closure. In these instances, the state pays for 100 percent of the operation and maintenance deficit.

Summary of Substitute Bill: 100 percent of the operation and maintenance deficit is paid by the state to Wahkiakum County when the Longview-Rainier bridge or the Astoria-Meglar bridge is closed due to emergency conditions. This provision is not effective unless fares on the ferry are comparable to those used for similar runs on the state ferry system.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill: The provision stating that the Wahkiakum County ferry fares must be comparable to similar runs on the state ferry system was added to the substitute as a condition of receiving 100 percent of the deficit when there are emergency conditions on either bridge.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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

Testimony For: Wahkiakum County needs this provision when emergencies occur. No additional funding is requested.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: Joan Neff, Washington State Department of Transportation (pro).