
Transportation Committee

HB 3270

Brief Description: Funding passenger-only ferry systems through sale or disposition of existing passenger-only vessels.

Sponsors: Representatives Woods, Kilmer, Jarrett, Morris, Skinner, Hankins and Haigh.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Provides grants to fund passenger only ferry service operated by Washington State Ferries on the Vashon Island to Seattle route and local governments on the Bremerton to Seattle, Southworth to Seattle, and Kingston to Seattle routes.
- Requires the sale of Washington State Ferries' passenger only vessels with the proceeds to be deposited in the passenger ferry account and used to provide grants for passenger only ferry service.
- Requires coordination of schedules and negotiation of agreements for shared use of Washington State Ferries facilities.
- Requires the creation of an apprenticeship program.
- Directs the Washington State Department of Transportation to create an appropriated grant program for passenger only ferry service with the capability to enter into multi-year contracts.

Hearing Date: 2/1/06

Staff: David Munnecke (786-7315).

Background:

Other than those operated by the Washington State Ferries (WSF), ferries are generally prohibited from crossing the Puget Sound or any of its tributary or connecting waters within 10 miles of a route served by the WSF unless granted a waiver by the Washington Utilities and Transportation Commission (UTC).

Privately operated passenger only ferries (POF) are exempt from this restriction, but must still receive a certificate from the UTC to operate on a particular route. The granting of new certificates by the UTC for POF service is prohibited until July 1, 2006.

Currently, Washington State Ferries operates POF service between Vashon Island and Seattle. Kitsap Transit has contracted with Kitsap Ferry Company LLC and Aqua Express LLC to operate POF service between Bremerton and Seattle and Kingston and Seattle respectively, but the Aqua Express service between Kingston and Seattle has been suspended.

Summary of Bill:

The Legislature finds that there is a compelling need for POF service on the Puget Sound, and that the Bremerton to Seattle, Southworth to Seattle, Vashon to Seattle and Kingston to Seattle routes should receive funding.

The funds in the passenger ferry account are to be used to provide grants for POF service operated by the WSF on the Vashon to Seattle route and POF service operated or contracted for by local governments on the Bremerton to Seattle, Southworth to Seattle, and Kingston to Seattle routes. The grants must be sufficient to cover costs not covered by fares or other revenue, as well as provide a reasonable rate of return. The funds are to be expended through Legislative appropriation.

By January 1, 2007, the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) is required to sell or otherwise dispose of the state passenger ferries Snohomish and Chinook and deposit the proceeds of the sales into the passenger ferry account. By April 1, 2007, the WSDOT is also required to sell or otherwise dispose of the state passenger ferries Skagit and Kalama, and deposit the proceeds of the sales into the passenger ferry account.

The POF systems operated or contracted for by local governments must coordinate their schedules with any WSF operations on the same routes. The WSF must negotiate agreements with interested POF systems operated or contracted for by local governments for the joint use of Southworth and Coleman docks and WSF maintenance facilities.

The WSF and POF systems operated or contracted for by local governments must negotiate an agreement establishing an apprenticeship program that includes a system allowing employees involved in the operation of POF systems operated or contracted for by local governments to become employees of the WSF.

Finally, the WSDOT is required to establish a local government ferry grant program, subject to the availability of amounts appropriated for this specific purpose. The WSDOT is authorized to enter into multiple year contracts, so long as it is stipulated that future year allocations are subject to Legislative appropriation. Priority must be given to grant applicants that provide continuity of existing passenger-only service and provide local or federal matching funds.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on January 30, 2006.

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