
Transportation Committee

SSB 5139

Brief Description: Modifying highway and bridge tolling authority.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Transportation (originally sponsored by Senators Haugen, Oke, Poulsen and Swecker).

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Repeals obsolete tolling and revenue bond statutes
- Removes prohibitions on tolling specific bridges and highways

Hearing Date: 3/28/05

Staff: Jeff Doyle (786-7322).

Background:

In 1937, the Washington Toll Bridge Authority was created by the Legislature with the full powers to finance, construct, and operate toll bridges. The legislation led to two initial toll financed projects: the Tacoma Narrows Bridge and the Lacey V. Murrow Memorial Bridge in Seattle, both of which opened to traffic in July 1940.

Between 1940 and 1965 thirteen state bridges were built or repaired by using tolls as the debt service payment for construction bonds. The majority of toll facilities were constructed between the years of 1950 and 1965. With the exception of the current Tacoma Narrows Bridge project, the emergency reconstruction of the Hood Canal Bridge has been the sole toll facility constructed in the forty years since 1965. All of the previously authorized toll bonds, including the emergency Hood Canal Bridge bonds, have been repaid and the tolls removed. Several of the bond authorizations stipulate that the bridges shall remain toll free after the date that the bonds have been fully paid and redeemed.

State law also contains legislative authorization for other toll roads and bridges that have not been undertaken and are not currently included in the State Transportation Plan. Examples of these authorizations include a limited access express highway from Tacoma to Everett and toll bridge from Lopez to San Juan Island.

The State Transportation Commission has broad authority to establish and construct toll facilities. Their authority is limited to those toll facilities that are specifically authorized by the Legislature, regional transportation investment district, city, town or county.

The Tacoma Narrows Bridge will be the next tolled facility in the state. An initial toll of \$3 will be collected when the new span opens in 2007. Toll rates will be set by the Washington State Transportation Commission in amounts sufficient to repay \$800 million in bond proceeds.

It is also anticipated that several other bridge reconstructions may be financed by tolls. Those facilities may include the State Route 520, Evergreen Point Floating Bridge (Rosellini Bridge), and the I-5 Columbia River Crossing among others.

Summary of Bill:

Statutory language relating to the approval of toll roads is clarified to indicate that the State Transportation Commission as the state toll authority imposes tolls and authorizes construction of toll roads.

Statutory provisions that relate to bond authorizations and other provisions on toll facilities that have been completed are repealed. Also repealed are authorizations for projects that have not been undertaken by the State Transportation Commission and where there is no current plan for those projects.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

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