

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SHB 3224

As Passed House:
February 19, 2008

Title: An act relating to a feasibility study on commuter rail services.

Brief Description: Reviewing and conducting studies on providing commuter rail services.

Sponsors: By House Committee on Transportation (originally sponsored by Representatives Loomis, Hunter, Sells and Liias).

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Transportation: 2/4/08, 2/6/08 [DPS].

Floor Activity:

Passed House: 2/19/08, 93-2.

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Directs the regional transit authority serving the Puget Sound region to work in conjunction with the Puget Sound Regional Council to analyze, and report to the Legislature, on whether commuter rail service between Eastern Snohomish County and Eastern King County can be a meaningful component of the region's future transportation system.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 23 members: Representatives Clibborn, Chair; Flannigan, Vice Chair; Appleton, Armstrong, Campbell, Dickerson, Eddy, Herrera, Hudgins, Kristiansen, Loomis, Rodne, Rolfes, Sells, Simpson, Smith, Springer, Takko, Upthegrove, Wallace, Warnick, Williams and Wood.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 3 members: Representatives Ericksen, Ranking Minority Member; Schindler, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Jarrett.

Staff: Kathryn Leathers (786-7114).

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

Background:

In 2003 the Burlington Northern Santa Fe (BNSF) Railway Company indicated its intent to divest approximately 40 miles of railroad corridor in East King and South Snohomish counties from its operational rail lines. The BNSF asked if there was public interest in maintaining or preserving this corridor for transportation purposes. In response, the Puget Sound Regional Council (PSRC) conducted a series of discussions with eight jurisdictions along the corridor as well as the Washington State Department of Transportation (Department); Sound Transit, the regional transit authority serving the region; and several environmental and related interest groups. The resulting recommendation was to preserve the corridor for future transportation uses; however, the Executive Board of the PSRC also recommended that further study be conducted.

Using federal grant funds, a subsequent study was conducted in 2006 by the PSRC's consultant team with extensive oversight from the BNSF Corridor Advisory Committee. The study covered the rail corridor from Renton to Snohomish, including an eight-mile leg from Woodinville to Redmond, and examined current and potential future transportation uses for this corridor.

Multiple corridor use scenarios were considered and analyzed by the PSRC, including such uses as trail only; trail with current rail; and trail with increased rail. The Department's separate Statewide Rail Capacity and Needs Study, which considered freight rail needs and explored ideas such as a state partnership with private sector companies, assisted the PSRC in reaching the conclusion that there is no strategic value to preserving the BNSF corridor as a freight corridor. The PSRC made final recommendations in January 2007 covering both short-term and long-term uses of the corridor, including the recommendation that the corridor be preserved for establishing a rail corridor trail alignment.

In 2007 leaders from King County, the Port of Seattle (Port), and the BNSF signed two memoranda of understanding formalizing proposals to exchange the BNSF rail for the transfer of King County International Airport to the Port. In this proposal, King County will take over the BNSF rail line along the eastern edge of Lake Washington, which runs from North Renton to Snohomish. The Port, on behalf of King County, will pay the BNSF \$103 million for approximately 40 miles of the rail line. The Port will also contribute up to \$66 million to King County toward development of a new regional trail, in exchange for the airport. Negotiations to finalize the proposal are ongoing.

Summary of Substitute Bill:

In regards to potential commuter rail service between Eastern Snohomish County and Eastern King County, the regional transit authority serving the Puget Sound region (Sound Transit) is directed to work in conjunction with the Puget Sound Regional Council (PSRC) to review existing studies that contain information on whether commuter rail service can be a meaningful component of the region's future transportation system. If, after reviewing existing studies, it is determined that existing information is insufficient to provide a complete

analysis of the corridor, Sound Transit must work with the PSRC to conduct a feasibility study to fill any gaps in information needed to complete their analysis.

A complete analysis of the corridor for commuter rail purposes includes, but is not limited to, an assessment of the number of potential riders in the region; locations that would most benefit from commuter rail service; estimated costs for establishing a bicycle and pedestrian path along or near the Woodinville subdivision; and the ability of existing rail lines to accommodate commuter rail service.

By February 1, 2009, Sound Transit and the PSRC must submit a joint report to the Legislature on its review, analysis, and any feasibility study conducted.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on February 3, 2008.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed. However, the bill is null and void if not funded in the budget.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) The Puget Sound Regional Council has already concluded that this rail corridor has real potential for commuter rail and trail service, and this study takes us to the next step and fills in the gap in our knowledge so that informed choices and long-term plans can be achieved. The existing rail bed will help save costs in such a project. Divesting this corridor is important to the BNSF Railroad Company. This project has been challenging to all parties involved. An appropriate study that puts all minds together on how to address this corridor is a positive thing.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Representative Loomis, prime sponsor; Bill Stauffacher, Burlington Northern Sante Fe Railway; and Rick DeWitt.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.