

SENATE BILL REPORT

HB 1717

As Reported by Senate Committee On:
Transportation, April 1, 2009

Title: An act relating to extending the time period for a franchise agreement for a rail line over the Milwaukee Road corridor.

Brief Description: Extending the time period for the department of transportation to enter into an agreement for a rail line over the Milwaukee Road corridor.

Sponsors: Representatives Clibborn, Armstrong, Wood, Warnick and Klippert.

Brief History: Passed House: 3/03/09, 97-0.

Committee Activity: Transportation: 3/26/09, 4/01/09 [DPA].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION

Majority Report: Do pass as amended.

Signed by Senators Haugen, Chair; Marr, Vice Chair; Swecker, Ranking Minority Member; Becker, Berkey, Delvin, Eide, Jacobsen, Jarrett, Kauffman, Kilmer, King, Ranker and Sheldon.

Staff: Dory Nicpon (786-7321)

Background: In 1980 the Milwaukee Road railroad declared bankruptcy, sold some of its properties, and salvaged its track. In 1981 the Legislature appropriated \$3.5 million to purchase the right of way in eastern Washington. The right of way owned by the state was eventually put under the management and control of three different state agencies: State Parks and Recreation Commission (Parks Commission), Department of Natural Resources (DNR), and the Department of Transportation (DOT).

It was originally envisioned that the entire right of way would form a cross-state recreational trail. During the 1995 legislative interim, the Legislative Transportation Committee convened a Freight Rail and Freight Mobility Task Force to examine the old Milwaukee Road corridor's potential for relieving freight congestion. The task force recommended resuming freight rail service over the portion of the old Milwaukee Road railroad running from Ellensburg to Lind.

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.

In order to resume rail service, a unified transportation corridor was created. State-owned portions of land running from Ellensburg to Lind were consolidated into a single owner, DOT. DOT was charged with management and control of the corridor, and was directed to negotiate a franchise agreement with a qualified rail carrier to operate service over the line. Since the new transportation corridor would interfere with the cross-state trail use, the Parks Commission was directed to establish a "replacement trail" once the DOT entered into a franchise agreement for the provision of rail service in the new corridor.

If DOT does not enter into a franchise agreement by July 1, 2009, the legislation creating this consolidated transportation corridor sunsets, and management of the trail between Ellensburg and Lind reverts back to the three state agencies.

Summary of Bill: The bill as referred to committee not considered.

Summary of Bill (Recommended Amendments): Portions of the rail line between Lind and Marengo are transferred to DOT.

The deadline for DOT to enter into a franchise agreement for rail service between Ellensburg to Lind, and between Lind to Marengo, along the old Milwaukee Road corridor is extended by ten years. If an agreement is not entered into by July 1, 2009, each segment of the transportation corridor will revert to its prior ownership and management by DOT, the Parks Commission, and DNR.

EFFECT OF CHANGES MADE BY TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE (Recommended Amendments as Passed Committee): Technical clarifications are made.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

Effective Date: The bill contains an emergency clause and takes effect on June 30, 2009.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony as Heard in Committee: PRO: Without costing any money, this bill enables the state to preserve a third freight rail corridor across the state.

OTHER: The State Parks and Recreation Commission hopes that future legislation regarding this corridor will preserve recreational uses.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Eric Johnson, Washington Public Ports Association; Terry Finn, Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railway.

OTHER: Fred Romero, State Parks and Recreation Commission.