
Transportation Committee

HB 1897

Brief Description: Establishing a rural mobility grant program.

Sponsors: Representatives Billig, Johnson, Clibborn, Armstrong, Lias, Takko, Walsh, Blake, Dunshee, Rolfes, Van De Wege, Lytton, Fitzgibbon and Ormsby.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Establishes the Rural Mobility Grant Program Account and requires quarterly transfers of \$2.5 million to that account from the Multimodal Transportation Account.
- Establishes the Rural Mobility Grant Program in statute and requires that the money appropriated for the program be evenly divided between competitive and noncompetitive grants for rural transit mobility.
- Requires the implementation of a pilot project to provide enhanced transit opportunities to agricultural workers through the establishment of vanpool programs.

Hearing Date: 2/22/11

Staff: David Munnecke (786-7315).

Background:

The Rural Mobility Grant Program (Program) was established in the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) in 1993. The Program was significantly expanded in 2003, and in the current biennium the Omnibus Transportation Budget contained a total of \$17 million divided equally between competitive grants, for providers of rural mobility service in areas not served or underserved by transit agencies, and formula grants for transit systems serving small cities and rural areas, which must be distributed in a manner similar to past disparity equalization programs.

According to the WSDOT, the purpose of the competitive portion of the program, is to establish, preserve, and improve rural public transportation. Funding in the Program is prioritized for

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services in rural counties, which are defined as counties without an urbanized area, as defined by the 2000 census. The following types of organizations are eligible for competitive grant funding:

- rural public transit agencies;
- non-profit organizations;
- private for-profit transportation service providers;
- tribal governments; and
- other general or local governments.

Summary of Bill:

The Rural Mobility Grant Program Account (Account) is established and State Treasurer is required to transfer \$2.5 million every quarter to the Account from the Multimodal Transportation Account. The earnings attributable to the funds in the Account are required to be received by that Account.

The Program is established in statute, with the designated purpose of aiding small cities and rural areas. Fifty percent of the money appropriated for the Program must go to noncompetitive grants for transit systems serving small cities and rural areas in a manner similar to past disparity equalization programs. The other 50 percent of the money appropriated for the Program must go to competitive grants to providers of rural mobility services in areas underserved by transit agencies. The WSDOT is required to provide an annual report to the Transportation committees of the Legislature on the status of grant projects funded by the Program, and may establish an advisory committee to assist with the Program.

The WSDOT is required to implement a pilot project during the 2011-2013 fiscal biennium to provide enhanced transit opportunities to agricultural workers through the establishment of vanpool programs. The pilot project must, at a minimum, provide appropriate vehicles, insurance, and maintenance and may charge a fee, as determined by the department, to riders.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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