

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1897

As Reported by House Committee On:
Transportation

Title: An act relating to establishing a rural mobility grant program.

Brief Description: Establishing a rural mobility grant program.

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

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Transportation: 2/22/11, 2/24/11 [DPS].

Brief Summary of Substitute 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 (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.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 27 members: Representatives Clibborn, Chair; Billig, Vice Chair; Liias, Vice Chair; Armstrong, Ranking Minority Member; Hargrove, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Angel, Asay, Eddy, Finn, Fitzgibbon, Jinkins, Johnson, Klippert, Kristiansen, Ladenburg, McCune, Moeller, Moscoso, Overstreet, Reykdal, Rivers, Rolfes, Ryu, Shea, Takko, Upthegrove and Zeiger.

Staff: David Munnecke (786-7315).

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:

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 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;
- nonprofit organizations;
- private for-profit transportation service providers;
- tribal governments; and
- other general or local governments.

Summary of Substitute Bill:

The Rural Mobility Grant Program Account (Account) is established and the 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 Rural Mobility Grant Program (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 WSDOT, to riders.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill:

The substitute bill requires the funding for the vanpool pilot program to come from the competitive portion of the Rural Mobility Grant Program.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) When we talk about transit, we often think about urban areas, but transit is also needed in rural areas. This bill would put the Rural Mobility Grant Program (Program) on the same level as the regional mobility program, which provides more of its funding to urban areas and is already established in statute.

The vanpool pilot project might be more appropriately placed in the competitive portion of the Program, and should be optional. There is no need for a new account because it could create more complexity in the budget process. The administrative costs of the Program are currently funded with federal money, and could be funded with state money instead, which would avoid potential federal issues.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Representative Billig, prime sponsor; Michael Shaw, Washington State Transit Association; and Brian Lagerberg, Washington State Department of Transportation.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.