
Transportation Committee

2ESSB 5785

Brief Description: Modifying requirements for the display and replacement of license plates.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Transportation (originally sponsored by Senators Ericksen, Rolfes, King, Ranker and Eide).

Brief Summary of Second Engrossed Substitute Bill

- Removes the requirement to periodically replace license plates.
- Requires that a license plate must be replaced at the time a vehicle changes ownership, at which time vehicle registration expires as well.
- Specifies that a vehicle registration is valid for 12 months or until the vehicle changes ownership.
- Requires that the new owner must make application for new license plates and registration renewal and pay any taxes and fees that are due at registration renewal.
- Requires that the new owner of a vehicle applying for a renewal registration must be credited for any motor vehicle excise tax paid by the previous owner that expired.
- Allows the new registered owner to apply to retain the license plates by paying the license plate transfer fee of \$10 per plate.
- Specifies that that the new license plates and registration do not need to be obtained for vehicles that are sold to vehicle dealers until the dealer sells the vehicle.
- Special license plates issued before discontinuation are valid until replaced.
- Applies to vehicle registrations that are due or become due on or after January 1, 2015.

Hearing Date: 2/24/14

Staff: Jerry Long (786-7306).

Background:

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.

License plates are replaced periodically to ensure maximum legibility and reflectivity. The Department of Licensing (DOL) in 1997 (Substitute House Bill 1008) was directed to use empirical studies to document the longevity of the reflective material used to make license plates and determine how often license plates need to be replaced, providing the DOL authorization to adopt rules for implementation. The DOL began replacing license plates under this program in 2000.

Research conducted when the program started indicated seven years as the most common replacement cycle among states with similar programs. In 2006 the DOL hired an independent consultant to study the seven-year replacement program. At that time, in states that had license plate replacement programs, the replacement cycles ranged from five years to 10 years. The states surveyed had an average replacement cycle of 6.8 years. The seven-year license plate replacement period is in Washington Administrative Code. The manufacturer's warranty on the license plate materials is five years.

There are a few type of plates that are exempt from the plate replacement program. These are: prorated vehicles over 16,000 pounds, commercial vehicles with declared gross weight over 26,000 pounds, collector vehicle plates, horseless carriage vehicle restored plates, plates issued to government agencies with exempt use class, and Medal of Honor license plates.

If the current license plate or plates assigned to the vehicle have been lost, defaced, destroyed, or become illegible the registered owner may apply for replacement plates.

A \$10 license plate transfer fee is required when transferring standard issue license plates from one vehicle to another, unless the owner or type of vehicle is exempt from payment.

There is a license plate retention fee of \$20 if the owner wishes to retain the current license plate number upon license plate replacement, unless the owner or type of vehicle is exempt from payment.

The plate replacement fee is \$10 per plate and \$2 for the reflective fee or \$24 total for a set of license plates.

Summary of Bill:

The requirement to periodically replace license plates is removed. However, a license plate must be replaced at the time a vehicle changes ownership, at which time vehicle registration expires as well. A vehicle registration is valid for 12 months or until the vehicle changes ownership. The new owner must make application for new license plates and registration renewal and pay any taxes and fees that are due at registration renewal. The new owner of a vehicle applying for a renewal registration must be credited for any motor vehicle excise tax paid by the previous owner that expired.

The Department of Licensing must offer owners the option of retaining the current license plates.

New license plates and registration do not need to be obtained for vehicles that are sold to vehicle dealers until the dealer sells the vehicle.

Special license plates issued before discontinuation are valid until replaced.

This act applies to vehicle registrations that are due or become due on or after January 1, 2015.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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