

# FINAL BILL REPORT

## 2ESSB 5785

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Synopsis as Enacted

**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).

**Senate Committee on Transportation**  
**House Committee on Transportation**

**Background:** Vehicle License Plates. Vehicles that are registered for use on public highways are issued license plates. Two identical license plates are issued for most passenger cars and pickup trucks; they must be displayed horizontally and conspicuously at the front and rear of the vehicle. When a vehicle changes ownership, the license plates follow the vehicle unless the seller applies to transfer the license plates to a replacement vehicle. There is a fee of \$20 to transfer license plates to a different vehicle.

The Department of Licensing (DOL) must determine how frequently license plates must be replaced to ensure maximum legibility and reflectivity. In doing so, DOL must use empirical studies documenting the longevity of the reflective materials. DOL has established, through rule, a seven-year replacement period for license plates. License plates must also be replaced if they have been lost, defaced, or are illegible and may be replaced at any time the owner chooses. There is a \$10 per plate fee for a standard issue license plate and a \$2 per plate reflectivity fee. When license plates are replaced, new license plates with a new number are issued for the vehicle; however upon application and payment of the \$20 plate retention fee, the owner may retain their plate number.

Vehicle Registration and Renewal. Generally, vehicles that are operated on public highways must be registered with DOL. At the time of original registration, a registration year is assigned. A vehicle registration is valid for 12 months.

At the time of vehicle registration and annual registration renewal, a \$30 vehicle license fee and various other statewide fees are due, including vehicle weight fees of \$10 to \$30 depending on the weight of the vehicle, the \$0.50 license service fee, and the \$0.25 license plate technology fee. In addition to statewide fees, various locally imposed taxes and fees are collected at vehicle registration renewal, such as local vehicles fees imposed by a transportation benefit district. Additionally, within the boundary of the regional transit

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authority, Sound Transit, there is a motor vehicle excise tax that is collected at the time of annual renewal.

**Summary:** 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 license plate does not expire when the change in ownership is related to a transfer between immediate family members or from a trust; when a lien holder is added or removed from a title or a leaseholder buys the leased vehicle; when removing a deceased spouse or domestic partner; or when the owner changes the owner's name.

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 new owner may apply to retain 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.

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

**Votes on Final Passage:**

Senate	47	0	
House	95	3	(House amended)
Senate	45	1	(Senate concurred)

**Effective:** June 12, 2014