
Environment Committee

HB 2757

Brief Description: Directing state transportation projects to include evaluation under the state environmental policy act of impacts to public transportation.

Sponsors: Representatives Fitzgibbon, Muri, Kilduff, Fey, Stokesbary, Jinkins, Goodman, Tarleton and Hickel.

<p style="text-align: center;">Brief Summary of Bill</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Requires the Department of Transportation to evaluate impacts to public transit operations as part of environmental review under the State Environmental Policy Act.
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Hearing Date: 1/25/16

Staff: Jacob Lipson (786-7196).

Background:

State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) Procedures and Mitigation.

The SEPA establishes a review process for state and local governments to identify environmental impacts that may result from government decisions, such as the issuance of permits or the adoption of land-use plans. The SEPA environmental review process involves a project applicant completing an environmental checklist to identify and evaluate probable environmental impacts. Government decisions that the SEPA checklist process identifies as having significant adverse environmental impacts must then undergo a more comprehensive environmental analysis in the form of an environmental impact statement (EIS).

Projects which undergo a SEPA review may be required to mitigate significant adverse environmental impacts in order to receive approval from the government entity performing the SEPA analysis. Project proponents may also choose to mitigate environmental impacts identified in the environmental checklist in order to receive a determination that the project does not have significant environmental impacts, and therefore can circumvent the process of completing an EIS for the project.

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.

WSDOT Transportation Planning and SEPA.

Transportation impacts, such as traffic and parking, are among the elements of the environment that are subject to review under the SEPA administrative rules. Both impacts to local government transportation infrastructure and Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) infrastructure, such as state highways, are potentially subject to environmental review and associated mitigation under SEPA. On state highway and other WSDOT projects, the WSDOT is the lead agency under SEPA that is responsible for conducting environmental reviews.

The WSDOT has adopted rules that govern the SEPA review processes for its projects. The WSDOT's SEPA rules provide that in planning and implementing proposed actions, the WSDOT will fully consider significant adverse economic, social, and environmental impacts, and will make project decisions in the best overall public interest, taking into account the need for transportation, the environmental impacts of projects and alternatives, and mitigation costs.

Public Transit Authorities.

Several types of public entities that provide transit services are established under state law. These public transit entities include regional transit authorities, metropolitan municipal corporation transit authorities, city transit systems, county transportation authorities, unincorporated public transportation benefit areas, and other special purpose districts formed to operate a public transportation system.

Summary of Bill:

The WSDOT must evaluate the impacts of state transportation projects to public transit operations under the SEPA. The review must cover the impacts to public transit operations by regional transit authorities, metropolitan transit authorities, city transit systems, county transportation authorities, unincorporated public transportation benefit areas, and other special purpose districts formed to operate a public transportation system.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Requested on 1/20/16.

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