

# SENATE BILL REPORT

## SB 6395

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As of February 2, 2016

**Title:** An act relating to the election and authority of regional transit authority board members.

**Brief Description:** Modifying the election and authority of regional transit authority board members.

**Sponsors:** Senators O'Ban, Dammeier, Miloscia, Sheldon, Rivers, Becker, Takko, Angel, Schoesler, Honeyford and Bailey.

**Brief History:**

**Committee Activity:** Transportation: 2/02/16.

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### SENATE COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION

**Staff:** Hayley Gamble (786-7452)

**Background:** A Regional Transit Authority (RTA) is authorized to use its tax revenues to plan, construct, and operate high-capacity transportation, such as express bus service and light rail. There is currently one RTA - Sound Transit - which operates light rail, commuter rail, and express bus service in Puget Sound. An RTA is governed by a board consisting of no more than 25 members, based on one member per 145,000 of population within a member county.

Board members are local elected officials appointed by the county executive and confirmed by the county legislative body. The Secretary of Transportation, or designee, also sits on the board of an RTA.

**Summary of Bill:** Nineteen non-partisan RTA board members must be directly elected from 19 districts containing approximately equal shares of the population. Board members may not hold other elected offices. Additionally, the Secretary of Transportation, or designee, is a non-voting member of the board.

A five-member districting commission shall be appointed by the Governor as soon as possible and shall be funded by the RTA to define the 19 districts. A 19-district plan provided by the districting commission must ensure population is evenly divided between districts. A new commission will repeat the districting process every 10 years after the

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*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.*

release of census data. Elected members will serve four-year staggered terms. A \$10,000 annual stipend and travel expenses are provided for RTA board members.

Election costs incurred by local jurisdictions for administering the election of an RTA's board will be reimbursed by the RTA.

This bill applies to current and future RTAs.

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Available.

**Committee/Commission/Task Force Created:** No.

**Effective Date:** The bill takes effect on March 1, 2017

**Staff Summary of Public Testimony:** PRO: Sound Transit has a budget larger than many municipalities and some states. It is time to make them a directly elected board, please allow voters to directly elect the board. The principle of no taxation without representation holds in this example and this bill will facilitate that. Governor Lockes Blue Ribbon Commission recommended this change. This is the right choice for the region. Areas within Sound Transit's boundaries but outside of Seattle are growing faster than Seattle. The election process in this bill is more equitable. The Eastside Transportation Partnership supported a past appointee to Sound Transit, but they were not reappointed because he was a dissenting voice while on the Sound Transit board. Of Sound Transit riders, 90 percent commute on express buses, not light rail. What could be wrong with an elected board? A higher stipend is needed to attract good candidates to these positions. This proposal has been before the Legislature before.

CON: Sound Transit already has accountability via the existing elected officials. Balkanizing the system will not help. Local elected officials help integrate the system and help with permitting and land use issues. The current system requires that half of the current board also serve on local transit agencies, integrating into the system. This is the work that is done every day. This bill would do damage to Sound Transit. The current board structure is working well for the region.

OTHER: The Policy Center has long recommended Sound Transit be directly elected. Citizens don't know if their representative will sit on the ST board or not, this was brought up by the Auditor. The current process gives some citizens more representation than others. Moving to an elected board will provide equal representation and shift power back to the voters.

**Persons Testifying:** PRO: Senator O'Ban, prime sponsor; Representative Harmsworth; Bruce Nurse, Dick Paylor, Bill Popp; Kevin Wallace; Don Davidson; John Niles, CETA.

CON: Fred Butler, Mayor of Issaquah; Paul Roberts, Councilmember Everett.

OTHER: Bob Pishue, Washington Policy Center.

**Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying:** No one.