

SENATE BILL REPORT

SSB 5018

As Amended by House, April 5, 2017

Title: An act relating to authorizing wheelchair accessible taxicabs access to high occupancy vehicle lanes.

Brief Description: Authorizing wheelchair accessible taxicabs access to high occupancy vehicle lanes.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Transportation (originally sponsored by Senators Hasegawa and Kuderer).

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Transportation: 1/23/17, 1/31/17 [DPS].

Floor Activity:

Passed Senate: 2/28/17, 49-0.

Passed House: 4/05/17, 97-0.

Brief Summary of First Substitute Bill

- Gives authority to grant access to high occupancy vehicle (HOV) lanes by wheelchair accessible taxicabs.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Bill No. 5018 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass.

Signed by Senators King, Chair; Hobbs, Ranking Minority Member; Liias, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Cleveland, Fortunato, Hawkins, O'Ban, Saldaña, Takko, Van De Wege, Walsh and Wilson.

Staff: Erica Bramlet (786-7321)

Background: Current law allows the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) and local authorities to reserve portions of any highways under their jurisdiction as limited access facilities, or HOV lanes. WSDOT and local authorities are currently authorized to give access to these limited access facilities to the following users:

- public transportation vehicles;

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- motorcycles;
- private motor vehicles carrying a minimum of a specified number of passengers; and
- certain private transportation provider vehicles with the capacity to carry eight or more passengers if such use does not interfere with the efficiency, reliability, and safety of public transportation operations.

Wheelchair-accessible taxis (WATs) are for hire vehicles designed or modified for the transportation of a person who is wheelchair-bound and has a physical or medical impairment. WATs are currently allowed to use HOV lanes only if they are carrying the specified number of passengers. None of the 53 wheelchair-accessible taxis currently operating in Washington State can legally carry eight or more passengers.

Summary of First Substitute Bill: WSDOT and local authorities may allow wheelchair-accessible taxis to use designated lanes or ramps, such as HOV lanes, operating for the exclusive use of certain vehicles.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Creates Committee/Commission/Task Force that includes Legislative members: No.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony on Original Bill: *The committee recommended a different version of the bill than what was heard.* PRO: This bill would fully assist the disabled community. It is costly to upgrade taxis to accommodate wheelchairs and the vehicles end up performing with a lower miles per gallon efficiency. There are currently just 53 wheelchair accessible taxis (all in King County) so the bill should not negatively impact the existing HOV lanes. Using the HOV lanes can cut travel time by half. King County traffic is currently so bad and this bill would help speed up travel time within the region for customers of wheelchair accessible taxis. Wheelchair accessible taxis provide equal access for the disabled community. Wheelchair accessible taxis are not treated as well as paratransit vehicles in current law. Transit service in the region does not operate at all hours when customers need to travel and therefore they call upon wheelchair accessible taxis.

OTHER: The phrase in the bill "wheelchair-bound" should be modified to correct the negative stereotype the phrase perpetuates.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator Bob Hasegawa, Prime Sponsor; Mohamed Salah, Wheelchair Accessible Taxi Assn of WA; Cindi Laws, Director, Wheelchair Accessible Taxi Assn of WA; Amar Khan, Vice President, Wheelchair Accessible Taxi Assn of WA; Thomas Muething, citizen; Noah Seidel, Self Advocates in Leadership.

OTHER: Toby Olson, Governor's Committee on Disability Issues and Employment.

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

EFFECT OF HOUSE AMENDMENT(S):

- Removes WSDOT authority to grant access to HOV lanes by wheelchair accessible taxicabs.
- Requires WSDOT to review HOV lane access rules and report back to the Legislature, looking specifically at the impacts of allowing in wheelchair accessible taxicabs.