

# SENATE BILL REPORT

## SB 6301

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As of January 25, 2018

**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, Sheldon and Becker.

**Brief History:**

**Committee Activity:** Transportation: 1/24/18.

**Brief Summary of Bill**

- Changes the board of a Regional Transit Authority (RTA) from appointed to elected.

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### SENATE COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION

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

**Background:** A 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 locally elected officials appointed by the county executive and confirmed by the county legislative body. At least half of all appointees from each county must serve on the governing body of a public transportation system. The Secretary of Transportation, or designee, also sits on the board of a RTA.

**Summary of Bill:** Eleven non-partisan RTA board members must be directly elected in 2018 from 11 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.

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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.*

A five-member districting commission must be appointed by the Governor as soon as possible and shall be funded by the RTA to define the 11 districts. An 11-district plan provided by the districting commission must ensure population is evenly divided between districts and that no more than five districts are solely within one county. A new commission will repeat the districting process every ten years after the 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 a RTA's board will be reimbursed by the RTA.

This bill applies to current and future RTAs.

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Available.

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

**Effective Date:** The bill contains several effective dates. Please refer to the bill.

**Staff Summary of Public Testimony:** PRO: The RTA board should be directly elected by those the RTA will tax. Sound Transit has a long program. This bill is written in a way that one county would not have a majority of the board. Sound Transit has been over budget and not on time and people will wonder why the board was not directly elected. Currently there is little incentive for board members to be accountable to the public. The board votes unanimously on their budget year after year. The bill continues the policy of requiring a two-thirds vote on major decisions. There is currently no recourse for the public for RTA votes. This bill would allow the people to directly hire the board and provides for geographic diversity. There is benefit to elected non-partisan board members, with only five coming from one county.

CON: We support the current governance structure. Overhauling the governance structure would create instability and risk. Voters made clear that they want transit and they want it sooner. The current structure serves the people well. Sound Transit has a federated board that works well, they are transparent in their governance and represent a diverse board. This bill would create a new layer of government and create election costs.

**Persons Testifying:** PRO: Senator Steve O'Ban, Prime Sponsor; Mariya Frost, Washington Policy Center; Ryan Ottele, citizen; Victor Bishop, Eastside Transportation Association.

CON: Abigail Doerr, Transportation Choices Coalition; Andrew Villeneuve, Northwest Progressive Institute.

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