

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1397

As Passed House:
March 5, 2019

Title: An act relating to encouraging the use of electric or hybrid-electric aircraft for regional air travel.

Brief Description: Encouraging the use of electric or hybrid-electric aircraft for regional air travel.

Sponsors: Representatives Slatter, Dent, Fey, Orcutt, Kloba, Valdez, Wylie, Pollet, Fitzgibbon, Tharinger, Morris, Eslick, Doglio and Ortiz-Self.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Transportation: 2/7/19, 2/25/19 [DP].

Floor Activity:

Passed House: 3/5/19, 88-10.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Directs the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) to convene a work group to study the electric aircraft industry and assess infrastructure needs related to electric aircraft for commercial air travel in Washington.
- Revises the WSDOT's general supervision of aeronautics to include aeronautics involving electrically powered aircraft.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 24 members: Representatives Fey, Chair; Slatter, 2nd Vice Chair; Valdez, 2nd Vice Chair; Wylie, 1st Vice Chair; Barkis, Ranking Minority Member; Young, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Chambers, Chapman, Dent, Doglio, Dufault, Entenman, Eslick, Gregerson, Lovick, Mead, Orcutt, Ortiz-Self, Paul, Pellicciotti, Ramos, Riccelli, Shewmake and Van Werven.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 5 members: Representatives Walsh, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Boehnke, Goehner, McCaslin and Shea.

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.

Staff: Patricia Hasan (786-7292).

Background:

Washington State Department of Transportation Aviation.

The Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) has general supervision of aeronautics within Washington. The WSDOT is directed to encourage, foster, and assist in the development of aeronautics in Washington and to encourage the establishment of airports and air navigation facilities. Air navigation facilities are used to provide aid in air navigation and include any structures, mechanisms, lights, beacons, markers, communicating systems, or other instruments or devices used as an aid to safe take-off, navigation, and landing of an aircraft or of the safe operation and maintenance of an airport. The WSDOT is also directed to cooperate with and assist the federal government, municipalities of Washington, and other bodies in developing aeronautics.

The current Washington Aviation System Plan (Plan) includes discussion on emerging trends and issues in aircraft innovation that the WSDOT anticipates will become relevant during the next 20 years. According to the Plan, electrically powered aircraft is one such innovation that is likely to become more widespread. Electric aircraft are allowable under Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) rules, and currently most are used primarily for experiments and demonstrations.

Electric Aircraft Work Group.

In the 2018 Legislative Session, the 2018 Supplemental Transportation Budget included direction to the WSDOT to convene an electric aircraft work group. The work group was tasked with analyzing the state of the electrically powered aircraft industry and assess infrastructure needs related to the deployment of electric or hybrid-electric aircraft for commercial air travel in Washington. The work group must report its findings and recommendations to the transportation committees of the Legislature by June 30, 2019. The authority for this work group expires at the end of the 2017-19 biennium, which is June 30, 2019.

Summary of Bill:

Washington State Department of Transportation Aviation.

The WSDOT is given direction to develop and sustain aeronautics involving electrically powered aircraft as part of the WSDOT's general supervision over aeronautics.

Electric Aircraft Work Group.

The WSDOT is directed to convene a work group to study the state of the electrically powered aircraft industry and assess infrastructure needs related to the deployment of electric or hybrid-electric aircraft for commercial air travel in Washington. The work group must be comprised of representatives from several industries related to electric or hybrid-electric aircraft, and the chair of the work group may be a consultant specializing in aeronautics.

The study must include recommendations to further the advancement of the electrification of aircraft for regional commercial use within Washington, including specific, measurable goals for the years 2030, 2040, and 2050 that reflect progressive and substantial increases in the

utilization of electric and hybrid-electric commercial aircraft. The work group must submit a report and accompanying recommendations to the transportation committees of the Legislature by November 15, 2020. By February 15, 2021, and every two years thereafter, the WSDOT must provide an electronic progress report on any efforts to implement the recommendations to the transportation committees of the Legislature.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) There is a vision of a future with zero airplane emissions and the growth of cost-effective local and regional air travel options. Washington has already provided a clean energy grant for research and development in the electric aircraft industry in the state. This is an example of how government can play a role in supporting novel research and development early on when venture capitalists or markets are not yet ready to provide funding.

In the past, there was a golden era of local and regional air travel that allowed people to commute and travel between communities. Electric aircraft will turn back the clock to a golden age for many small towns and cities across the country, and will also bring about a revived economic growth and opportunity for these communities. Air travel was common in many American cities, and the infrastructure for regional airplane travel was in place at least 25 years before the creation of the Interstate highway system. There are approximately 4,000 small local airports in the United States, but just 200 of them have scheduled airline service. When the short-haul flights were withdrawn, there were no decent local rail options, and the number of people using the highways increased, helping to create the traffic, transportation gridlock, and infrastructure needs states are facing today.

This bill offers the opportunity for Washington to address the new option for short-haul air travel, to build a plan, and to continue to lead the world in aviation. Utilizing electric aircraft for short-haul flights can provide Washington residents with a short distance airline option that can revive community airports and provide economic development options for rural and suburban communities.

(Opposed) None.

(Other) Electric propulsion is the future of aviation. Although domestic and international electric travel is in the distant future, the technology for regional air travel is within reach. The WSDOT was directed to form the Electric Aircraft Work Group to explore the feasibility of introducing electric and hybrid-electric aircraft in Washington. Members of the work group included representatives from aerospace manufacturing, the FAA, investment groups, airlines, electric utilities, government, and workforce development. The work group will provide a report to the Legislature in June 2019.

Electric aircraft have the potential to provide significant improvements in both travel and environmental stewardship in the state. Electric aircraft are significantly more affordable in both operating and maintenance costs, which provides the air transportation industry with an opportunity to reduce costs in the struggling regional air travel market while providing more affordable options for the traveling public. Electric propulsion is also good for the environment with reduced or zero emissions and a significant reduction in noise. Electric air travel could eventually result in reduced road congestion as flying becomes more cost competitive with driving.

As a leader in aerospace manufacturing and with a strong aviation industry, Washington is uniquely positioned to be a leader in this emerging field. The aerospace industry is moving rapidly to develop, manufacture, and deploy this type of technology. This bill enables the second phase of the work group, which will be to identify six Washington airports to participate in an electric aircraft pilot program and develop solutions to design electric aircraft airport infrastructure.

Persons Testifying: (In support) Representative Slatter, prime sponsor.

(Other) David Fleckenstein, Washington State Department of Transportation.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.