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## Transportation Committee

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### HB 1655

**Brief Description:** Encouraging the opening of safety rest areas to the public.

**Sponsors:** Representatives Griffey, Shewmake, Barkis, Eslick, Chase, Graham, Paul, Dent, Gilday, Jacobsen, Pollet, Riccelli, Frame, Young and Taylor.

#### Brief Summary of Bill

- Directs the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) to reconfigure its maintenance operations to assure that state-owned and operated safety rest areas are open for use except for seasonal closures or cleaning, maintenance, and repairs.
- Allows the WSDOT to take advantage of the gig economy and restructure existing vacant employee positions to align with current needs.
- Allows the WSDOT to issue short-term contracts to provide cleaning, security, or repairs of safety rest areas when the WSDOT is unable to provide such services with existing employees.
- Declares an emergency and provides an immediate effective date.

**Hearing Date:** 1/18/22

**Staff:** Christine Thomas (786-7142).

#### Background:

*Safety Rest Areas.* The Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) owns and operates 47 safety rest areas across the state, most open to the public 24 hours a day. Features of the safety rest areas include parking, ADA accessible restrooms, drinking water, traveler

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information, vending machines, picnic areas, public telephones, and more. The WSDOT estimates more than 23 million visitors used the state's safety rest areas in 2020 and all safety rest areas remained open during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020.

*Routine and Annual Maintenance of Safety Rest Areas.* The WSDOT's maintenance staff routinely monitor and maintain the safety rest areas and regular maintenance activities include:

- cleaning restrooms;
- clearing gutters;
- landscape maintenance;
- sweeping sidewalks and parking areas;
- emptying trash cans; and
- other maintenance needs.

Maintenance staff also perform annual maintenance activities that generally require closure of the safety rest areas for about a week. Annual maintenance activities include:

- pressure washing and cleaning picnic tables;
- pressure washing sidewalks, other walkways, and gathering areas;
- performing landscape maintenance and dangerous tree removal;
- cleaning out catch basins and drainage system for parking areas;
- repainting parking stalls and cleaning signs; and
- conducting other routine maintenance on light fixtures, hand dryers, and heating systems.

*Long-Term Closures of Safety Rest Areas.* Occasionally, the WSDOT must close rest areas for more than three months. These long-term closures may occur for one or more of the following reasons:

- seasonal conditions causing road closures;
- performing major repairs of roofing, heating, or plumbing systems;
- deep cleaning and sanitizing of parking areas to remove human excrement;
- performing major repairs of failed or vandalized systems; and
- staffing challenges.

*Recent Public Safety Rest Area Closures.* In January 2022, according to the WSDOT's website, several safety rest areas are closed: (1) two safety rest areas on Interstate 5 (I-5) are closed near the Canadian border for an estimated three months due to staffing issues; (2) one rest area on southbound I-5 near Everett is closed indefinitely for maintenance reasons; and (3) five other safety rest areas across the state are closed due to winter conditions.

### **Summary of Bill:**

The WSDOT must reconfigure its maintenance operations to assure that state-owned and operated safety rest areas are open for use except for seasonal closures or cleaning, maintenance, and repairs. The WSDOT may take advantage of the gig economy and restructure existing vacant employee positions to align with current needs to keep safety rest areas open. The WSDOT may issue short-term contracts to provide cleaning, security, or repairs to safety rest

areas when the WSDOT is unable to provide such services with existing employees.

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Requested on January 11, 2022.

**Effective Date:** The bill contains an emergency clause and takes effect immediately.