

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5603

As of January 17, 2022

Title: An act relating to a comprehensive study of the state route number 2 corridor to improve safety and mobility, including outreach to adjacent communities.

Brief Description: Proposing a comprehensive study of the state route number 2 corridor to improve safety and mobility, including outreach to adjacent communities.

Sponsors: Senators Hawkins, Wagoner, Lovick and Padden.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Transportation: 1/17/22.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Requires the state Department of Transportation to study traffic flow, safety, and mobility along state route number 2 (US 2) between Monroe and Wenatchee, conduct public outreach, and propose future investments.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION

Staff: Daniel Masterson (786-7454)

Background: State route number 2 (US 2) extends 323 miles in Washington, from Everett in the west to Newport along the Idaho border. US 2 serves as a critical east-west connection between the Puget Sound region through Stevens Pass to Chelan County and the rest of eastern Washington.

The Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) conducts various project-specific planning activities. These activities are frequently required in biennial transportation budgets and can also be self-directed by WSDOT.

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

Summary of Bill: WSDOT shall study traffic flow, safety, and mobility along the US 2 corridor between Monroe and Wenatchee and propose investments, which may include improvement projects, preservation, and maintenance.

WSDOT shall conduct public outreach and engagement with communities along the corridor, including public meetings. At a minimum, the communities of Wenatchee, Cashmere, Leavenworth, Skykomish, Index, Gold Bar, Sultan, and Monroe must be notified and invited to participate.

In conducting this study, WSDOT shall use studies, designs, plans, and other documents that are presented to them by stakeholders along the corridor including, but not limited to, proposed solutions that have been identified by the city of Sultan to address mobility and safety and improvements as well as those proposed solutions identified in the Chelan-Douglas transportation council's upper Wenatchee Valley transportation corridor study.

WSDOT shall submit a preliminary report to the Office of Financial Management and the transportation committees of the Legislature by December 1, 2022. The report must include a list of recommended improvements along the corridor. Identified improvements shall address mobility, safety, and other concerns with the corridor, as identified through the public outreach and engagement required by the bill. Each recommended improvement shall include an estimated total cost of all phases, as well as cost estimates for each phase of each identified improvement.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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: PRO: There's been quite a bit of work done to identify potential improvements, both for safety and traffic flow, along the US 2 corridor, and around Leavenworth and Sultan in particular. This bill would direct WSDOT to collect the information that has already been assembled, and then have WSDOT reach out to the communities to collect additional information on maintenance, preservation, and safety and traffic flow improvements. I don't want to miss a significant opportunity get some much needed improvements along this corridor. I have been looking into options to scale back and adjust the timeline of the bill based on feedback from WSDOT. The city of Monroe supports this bill. I'm thankful for the advocacy work that has led to safety and capacity improvements on this corridor since 2000. US 2 is a critical link between eastern and western WA. It is used for people mobility, freight, commerce, and emergency services. It is frequently an alternative to I-90. The current condition of US 2 has significant adverse impacts to communities along the corridor. It is common that people are unable to turn on

to US 2 from county roads, cities streets and private driveways. Accidents are common throughout the corridor. Improvements along the whole corridor are important, including the US 2 bypass. US 2 gets a lot of traffic. It's often open when I-90 is not. Leavenworth is unique. We don't just have to worry about the traffic coming to pass through because it's a major highway. We have to worry about the traffic caused because of Leavenworth. We have over 2 million guests a year stop in our town. Most mountain communities don't have a major highway that splits them in half, but we do. This is a safety and mobility issue. This bill would help us be in a place to look for funding. Sultan is divided in half by highway 2 and has been directly impacted by the 24,000 vehicles travelling eastbound and westbound daily. A significant number of these travelers divert onto local roads trying to avoid highway 2 gridlock and we've seen the unfortunate common occurrence of head-on collisions. Our city's local roads carry four times our population, which is directly caused by the diversion of vehicles traveling on highway 2. This congestion directly correlates to safety issues on highway 2 and our local roads. Gold Bar recognizes that our economy is now recreation based. Our community can be torn at times between encouraging the influx of visitors and Stevens Pass travelers and wishing Gold Bar was at the end of a dead end road when the highway becomes a parking lot. What used to be short backups on holiday weekends have evolved to hours-long backups that extend east from Sultan 14 miles to Index. Skepticism of governments at all levels is at an all-time high. Citizens of the Skykomish valley are losing faith in government's ability to address traffic issues on highway 2. The safety and mobility of highway 2 is perhaps the number one concern of Gold Bar citizens. The US 2 corridor is not just a beautiful way to get across the mountains. It is a corridor tens of thousands of Snohomish County residents have to deal with every single day. More and more people are learning about the fun along the US 2 corridor. We need to make sure that infrastructure is keeping up with demand. The congestion experienced by Snohomish County residents is not just an inconvenience but a hinderance to the economic success of our communities. The fatal tragedies that have occurred along the US 2 corridor are unacceptable. These challenges will only increase as population continues to increase. I am a lifelong resident of Peshastin. As a resident and fruit grower, I've seen first-hand the increased popularity of this vital US 2 corridor. Recreation, tourism, commerce and new home ownership have all contributed to the strain of this system. Increased congestion only highlights the need for a closer look at the access and safety concerns with intersections and the free flow of traffic. Some traffic improvements have helped, although others have created unintended consequences with other areas of US 2. This is why it's so important to have a comprehensive approach to determine projects on US 2.

OTHER: This bill requires a study of a long corridor with numerous urban and rural communities and environmentally sensitive areas. Based on the proposed timeline, WSDOT would need to procure a consultant which could take up to three months, leaving us three months to do the study. WSDOT would update cost estimates and consider practical solutions approaches that promote system resiliency. Due to the tight timeline, outreach would be limited to a partner jurisdiction technical review of draft materials towards the end of this study process. We are concerned that this truncated approach would

not provide our partners with the quality, depth and collaboration they expect from WSDOT planning work. A thorough study of this magnitude would come at a higher cost and require significantly more time to conduct.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator Brad Hawkins, Prime Sponsor; Carl Florea, City of Leavenworth; Russell Wiita, City of Sultan, Mayor; Carnan Bergren; Misha Lujan, Economic Alliance Snohomish County; Geoffrey Thomas, City of Monroe, Mayor; Steven Yarbrough, Mayor of Gold Bar, WA.

OTHER: David Bierschbach, Washington State Department of Transportation; Robin Mayhew, Washington State Department of Transportation.

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