

---

## Transportation Committee

---

### HB 2497

**Brief Description:** Creating the Washington state ferries 75 work group.

**Sponsors:** Representatives Nance, Fitzgibbon, Fey, Abbarno, Peterson, McEntire, Shavers, Street, Pollet, Mena, Berry, Ramos, Slatter, Tharinger, Farivar, Reed, Senn, Walsh, Callan, Davis, Lekanoff, Chapman, Kloba, Donaghy, Simmons, Alvarado, Ryu and Leavitt.

#### Brief Summary of Bill

- Directs the Joint Transportation Committee to create a Washington State Ferries (WSF) 75 work group to evaluate funding requirements for the WSF to reliably operate service, explore options to increase dedicated funding sources for the ferry system, and identify methods to optimize the receipt of federal funds by the WSF.
- Directs the Washington State Institute for Public Policy to conduct a statewide and systemwide economic impact study of ferry service disruptions.

**Hearing Date:** 2/14/24

**Staff:** Beth Redfield (786-7140).

#### Background:

Since June 1, 1951, the Washington State Ferries (WSF) has provided cross-Puget Sound ferry services for vehicles and foot passengers. Currently, the WSF provides service on 10 ferry routes with almost 450 sailings per day. In 2023 the system served a total of 18.8 million riders.

Beginning in 2020 service has been curtailed due to crewing challenges and vessel availability. In March of 2022 the WSF released a Service Restoration Plan outlining service restoration on a

---

*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.*

route-by-route basis. In January of 2024 the plan was changed to a Service Contingency Plan detailing how the WSF will add service when it has the boats and crewing availability to do so.

The 2023 Omnibus Transportation Budget included \$25 million in workforce investments in deck, engine, maintenance, human resources, diversity outreach, and project management for new recruitment and retention initiatives. In the last five years, the Legislature has funded five additional hybrid-electric vessels, and provided additional vessel preservation resources. In 2023 the WSF was authorized to open vessel procurement to out-of-state shipyards, while allowing in-state shipyards a 13 percent bid credit.

**Summary of Bill:**

The Joint Transportation Committee (JTC) is directed to create a WSF 75 work group to evaluate funding requirements for the WSF to reliably operate service, explore options to increase dedicated funding sources for the ferry system, and identify methods to optimize the receipt of federal funds by the WSF.

The work group is composed of two appointees each from the House and Senate transportation committees, four representatives of ferry served communities, and representatives of labor, the WSF, and the Office of the Governor (Governor's Office).

The work group must make preliminary recommendations to the Governor and appropriate committees of the Legislature by January 13, 2025, and final findings and recommendations by June 1, 2026.

The work group expires June 1, 2026.

The Washington State Institute for Public Policy is directed to conduct a statewide and systemwide economic impact study of ferry service disruptions. A preliminary report must be submitted to the Governor's Office and the JTC WSF 75 work group by December 13, 2024, and a final report by June 1, 2025.

**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Preliminary fiscal note available.

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