
SUBSTITUTE SENATE BILL 5556

State of Washington

69th Legislature

2025 Regular Session

By Senate Transportation (originally sponsored by Senators Ramos, Lovick, Valdez, Lovelett, Shewmake, Chapman, Trudeau, Nobles, and C. Wilson)

READ FIRST TIME 02/17/25.

1 AN ACT Relating to modernizing the adopt-a-highway program to
2 improve its ability to meet its original purpose within existing
3 fiscal limitations; amending RCW 47.40.100 and 47.36.400; adding a
4 new section to chapter 47.40 RCW; creating a new section; and
5 providing an effective date.

6 BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF WASHINGTON:

7 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 1.** (1) The legislature recognizes that the
8 state's adopt-a-highway program has enabled individuals, groups, and
9 businesses to participate in keeping the state's highways clean and
10 that the program has been successful for over 30 years in helping to
11 reduce litter in Washington. The legislature further finds that the
12 program requires a modernization to ensure the original purpose of
13 providing volunteers and businesses an opportunity to contribute to a
14 cleaner environment, enhanced roadsides, and protection of wildlife
15 habitats is fulfilled.

16 (2) The legislature further finds that transportation funding
17 resources are limited and the needs are great. Therefore, the
18 legislature intends to add additional accountability to the program
19 and ensure that the department of transportation's limited resources
20 can be directed to areas with the greatest need.

1 (3) To that end, the legislature intends to (a) prioritize
2 funding for the program in alignment with priorities for the
3 transportation system as a whole, and (b) ensure that volunteers and
4 businesses participating as volunteers and/or sponsors are committed
5 to the goals of the program and are provided the opportunity to
6 participate, to the extent funds are available.

7 **Sec. 2.** RCW 47.40.100 and 2019 c 353 s 11 are each amended to
8 read as follows:

9 (1)(a) ~~((The))~~ Subject to the availability of amounts
10 appropriated for this specific purpose in an omnibus transportation
11 appropriations act, the department of transportation shall establish
12 a statewide adopt-a-highway program. The purpose of the program is to
13 provide volunteers and businesses an opportunity to contribute to a
14 cleaner environment, enhanced roadsides, and protection of wildlife
15 habitats. Participating volunteers and businesses shall adopt
16 department-designated sections of state highways, rest areas, park
17 and ride lots, intermodal facilities, and any other facilities the
18 department deems appropriate, in accordance with rules adopted by the
19 department. The department may elect to coordinate a consortium of
20 participants for adopt-a-highway projects.

21 (b) The adopt-a-highway program shall include, at a minimum,
22 litter control for the adopted section, and may include additional
23 responsibilities such as planting and maintaining vegetation,
24 controlling weeds, graffiti removal, and any other roadside
25 improvement or clean-up activities the department deems appropriate.
26 Whenever possible, when planting and maintaining vegetation,
27 volunteers and businesses should use native forage plants that are
28 pollen-rich or nectar-rich and beneficial for all pollinators,
29 including honey bees, in order to develop habitat beneficial for the
30 feeding, nesting, and reproduction of pollinators. The department
31 shall not accept adopt-a-highway proposals that would have the effect
32 of terminating classified employees or classified employee positions.

33 (2) A volunteer group ~~((or)),~~ business, or sponsor choosing to
34 participate in the adopt-a-highway program must submit a proposal to
35 the department. The department shall review the proposal for
36 consistency with departmental policy and rules. The department may
37 accept, reject, or modify an applicant's proposal.

38 (3) The department shall seek partnerships with volunteer groups
39 and businesses to facilitate the goals of this section. The

1 department may solicit funding for the adopt-a-highway program that
2 allows private entities to undertake all or a portion of financing
3 for the initiatives. The department shall develop guidelines
4 regarding the cash, labor, and in-kind contributions to be performed
5 by the participants.

6 (4) An organization whose name: (a) Endorses or opposes a
7 particular candidate for public office, (b) advocates a position on a
8 specific political issue, initiative, referendum, or piece of
9 legislation, or (c) includes a reference to a political party shall
10 not be eligible to participate in the adopt-a-highway program.

11 (5) In administering the adopt-a-highway program, the department
12 shall:

13 (a) Provide a standardized application form, registration form,
14 and contractual agreement for all participating groups. The forms
15 shall notify the prospective participants of the risks and
16 responsibilities to be assumed by the department and the
17 participants;

18 (b) Require all participants to be at least fifteen years of age;

19 (c) Require parental consent for all minors;

20 (d) Require at least one adult supervisor for every eight minors;

21 (e) Require one designated leader for each participating
22 organization, unless the department chooses to coordinate a
23 consortium of participants;

24 (f) Assign each participating organization a section or sections
25 of state highway, or other state-owned transportation facilities, for
26 a specified period of time;

27 (g) (~~Recognize~~) Subject to the availability of amounts
28 appropriated for this specific purpose in an omnibus transportation
29 appropriations act, recognize the efforts of a participating
30 organization by erecting and maintaining signs with the
31 organization's name on both ends of the organization's section of
32 highway;

33 (h) Provide appropriate safety equipment. Safety equipment issued
34 to participating groups must be returned to the department upon
35 termination of the applicable adopt-a-highway agreement;

36 (i) Provide safety training for all participants;

37 (j) Pay any and all premiums or assessments required under RCW
38 51.12.035 to secure medical aid benefits under chapter 51.36 RCW for
39 all volunteers participating in the program;

1 (k) Require participating businesses to pay all employer premiums
2 or assessments required to secure medical aid benefits under chapter
3 51.36 RCW for all employees or agents participating in the program;

4 (l) Maintain records of all injuries and accidents that occur;

5 (m) Adopt rules that establish a process to resolve any question
6 of an organization's eligibility to participate in the adopt-a-
7 highway program;

8 (n) Obtain permission from property owners who lease right-of-way
9 before allowing an organization to adopt a section of highway on such
10 leased property; and

11 (o) Establish procedures and guidelines for the adopt-a-highway
12 program.

13 (6) Nothing in this section affects the rights or activities of,
14 or agreements with, adjacent landowners, including the use of rights-
15 of-way and crossings, nor impairs these rights and uses by the
16 placement of signs.

17 (7) The department shall submit annually by December 1st to the
18 transportation committees of the legislature and the office of
19 financial management a list in excel or similar electronic format
20 that includes: (a) Each participating organization and program
21 applicant; (b) whether the participant or applicant partners with a
22 paid contractor or acts solely as a volunteer; (c) the location of
23 each highway section adopted; (d) whether the participant has met the
24 obligations of its contractual agreement during the last year; and
25 (e) any contextual information the department deems relevant.

26 **Sec. 3.** RCW 47.36.400 and 1998 c 180 s 1 are each amended to
27 read as follows:

28 ((The)) Subject to the availability of amounts appropriated for
29 this specific purpose in an omnibus transportation appropriations
30 act, the department may install adopt-a-highway signs, with the
31 following restrictions:

32 (1) Signs shall be designed by the department and may only
33 include the words "adopt-a-highway litter control facility" or
34 "adopt-a-highway litter control next XX miles" and the name of the
35 litter control area sponsor. The sponsor's name shall not be
36 displayed more predominantly than the remainder of the sign message.
37 Trademarks or business logos may be displayed;

38 (2) Signs may be placed along interstate, primary, and scenic
39 system highways;

1 (3) Signs may be erected at other state-owned transportation
2 facilities in accordance with RCW 47.40.100(1);

3 (4) For each litter control area designated by the department,
4 one sign may be placed visible to traffic approaching from each
5 direction;

6 (5) Signs shall be located so as not to detract from official
7 traffic control signs installed pursuant to the manual on uniform
8 traffic control devices adopted by the department;

9 (6) Signs shall be located so as not to restrict sight distance
10 on approaches to intersections or interchanges;

11 (7) The department may charge reasonable fees to defray the cost
12 of manufacture, installation, and maintenance of adopt-a-highway
13 signs.

14 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 4.** A new section is added to chapter 47.40
15 RCW to read as follows:

16 By December 1, 2025, the department shall report to the
17 transportation committees of the legislature and the office of
18 financial management with a list in excel or similar electronic
19 format that includes the following information for each current
20 participant in the adopt-a-highway program established in RCW
21 47.40.100:

22 (1) Name of the participating or applying volunteer group or
23 sponsor;

24 (2) Whether the participant or applicant partners with a paid
25 contractor or acts solely as a volunteer;

26 (3) The location of each highway section adopted;

27 (4) The participant's record of compliance with the obligations
28 of its contractual agreement since becoming a program participant;
29 and

30 (5) Any contextual information the department deems relevant.

31 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 5.** If any provision of this act or its
32 application to any person or circumstance is held invalid, the
33 remainder of the act or the application of the provision to other
34 persons or circumstances is not affected.

1 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 6.** Sections 2 and 3 of this act take effect
2 July 1, 2026.

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