

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5646

As Passed Senate, March 13, 2003

Title: An act relating to incentives to increase transportation revenues by reforming laws limiting the provision of passenger-only ferry service.

Brief Description: Providing incentives to increase transportation revenues by reforming laws limiting the provision of passenger-only ferry service.

Sponsors: Senators Oke, Poulsen and B. Sheldon.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Highways & Transportation: 2/20/03, 3/4/03 [DP].
Passed Senate: 3/13/03, 49-0.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HIGHWAYS & TRANSPORTATION

Majority Report: Do pass.

Signed by Senators Horn, Chair; Benton, Vice Chair; Swecker, Vice Chair; Esser, Finkbeiner, Haugen, Jacobsen, Kastama, Oke, Prentice and Spanel.

Staff: Tami Neilson (786-7452)

Background: Currently, nonstate ferries are prohibited from crossing the Puget Sound or any of its tributary or connecting waters within ten miles of a route served by the Washington State Ferry System (WSF). However, the Washington Utilities and Transportation Commission may, upon written petition of a commercial ferry operator, grant a waiver from this ten mile restriction.

Additionally, if any party assumes the operation and maintenance of any ferry or ferry system by rent, lease, or charter from the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT), it is bound by WSDOT's contractual obligations, including existing labor contracts.

Summary of Bill: Operators of passenger-only ferry service do not need to apply for the ten-mile waiver to provide service. WSDOT must make its terminal, dock, and pier space available to operators of passenger-only ferries if such use does not limit the operation of WSF's auto ferries. WSDOT may not charge any lease, rent, or fee in excess of fair market value.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Testimony For: Passenger-only ferry service provided by WSF may end on June 15, 2003, and other providers should be able to offer service. The ten-mile rule covers a lot of distance, making it difficult for operators to provide service in the Puget Sound region.

Testimony Against: Companies cannot afford to provide this service; subsidies will be needed. Concerns: It would be difficult to determine fair market value.

Testified: Senator Bob Oke (pro); David Freiboth, Inland Boatman's Union (con); Mike Thorne, Washington State Department of Transportation (concerns); Jim Boldt, Victoria Clipper (pro).