

SENATE BILL REPORT

SHB 3224

As Reported By Senate Committee On:
Transportation, March 03, 2008

Title: An act relating to a feasibility study on commuter rail services.

Brief Description: Reviewing and conducting studies on providing commuter rail services.

Sponsors: House Committee on Transportation (originally sponsored by Representatives Loomis, Hunter, Sells and Liias).

Brief History: Passed House: 2/19/08, 93-2.

Committee Activity: Transportation: 2/27/08, 3/3/08 [DP].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION

Majority Report: Do pass.

Signed by Senators Haugen, Chair; Marr, Vice Chair; Swecker, Ranking Minority Member; Berkey, Delvin, Eide, Jacobsen, Kastama, Kauffman, Kilmer, King, Pflug, Sheldon and Spanel.

Staff: Dory Nicpon (786-7321)

Background: In 2003 the Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railway Company (BNSF) indicated its intent to divest itself of approximately 40 miles of railroad corridor in East King and South Snohomish counties, and offered the corridor to public entities in the region. The Puget Sound Regional Council (PSRC) conducted a series of discussions among eight jurisdictions along the corridor, the Washington State Department of Transportation (DOT), Sound Transit, and several environmental and related interest groups.

The consultant engaged by PSRC analyzed multiple corridor use scenarios including trail only, trail with current rail, and trail with increased rail, and developed recommendations regarding the various segments of the rail line. The PSRC consultant study relied upon DOT's Statewide Rail Capacity and Needs Study in concluding that there is no strategic value to preserving the BNSF corridor as a freight corridor.

The Port of Seattle has negotiated the purchase of the rail line from BNSF. Negotiations to finalize the transaction are pending.

Summary of Bill: Sound Transit must collaborate with PSRC to determine whether commuter rail service between eastern Snohomish County and eastern King County can be a

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meaningful component of the region's future transportation system. The analysis undertaken by Sound Transit and PSRC must:

- assess possible ridership of commuter rail in the region;
- evaluate locations that would most benefit from commuter rail service;
- evaluate potential station sites;
- evaluate the ability of the existing rail to accommodate commuter rail service and the impact of commuter rail on tourism, and existing or planned operations;
- estimate the costs of concurrent bicycle and pedestrian uses near the Woodinville subdivision; and
- evaluate the relative cost-effectiveness of commuter rail service along the various segments of the line. If existing data is insufficient to evaluate the specified issues, then Sound Transit and PSRC must conduct a feasibility study to do so.

Sound Transit and PSRC must submit a joint report of their analysis to the transportation committees of the Legislature by February 1, 2009.

The bill is null and void if not funded in the budget.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony on Substitute Bill: PRO: There is a lot of community interest in studying the possible transportation uses of this corridor. Individuals travelling to employment centers along the corridor currently experience extended commute times due to traffic congestion. This particular corridor has exceptional potential because of its location and easy connectivity with other transportation systems. If the track is removed, then it may be prohibitively expensive to replace at a later date. The Port of Seattle has indicated support for steam train (dinner train) operations along this route. The House transportation budget provides \$100,000 for this study. Sound Transit is willing to commit an additional \$200,000 and the Discovery Institute has secured \$25,000 in private funds for it.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Representative Liz Loomis, prime sponsor; Rick DeWitt, citizen.