

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 6339

As Reported By Senate Committee On:
Transportation, January 26, 2006

Title: An act relating to allocating federal surface transportation program enhancement funds.

Brief Description: Allocating federal surface transportation program enhancement funds.

Sponsors: Senator Haugen.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Transportation: 1/23/06, 1/26/06 [DP, w/oRec].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION

Majority Report: Do pass.

Signed by Senators Haugen, Chair; Jacobsen, Vice Chair; Poulsen, Vice Chair; Benson, Ranking Minority Member; Berkey, Eide, Mulliken, Oke, Sheldon, Spanel, Swecker and Weinstein.

Minority Report: That it be referred without recommendation.

Signed by Senators Benton and Esser.

Staff: Kelly Simpson (786-7403)

Background: Federal transportation enhancement funds are made available to states by the Federal Highway Administration through its surface transportation program. The funds are required to be allocated by states to support twelve different eligible categories of surface transportation-related projects, including facilities for pedestrians and bicycles, scenic beautification projects, historic preservation projects, environmental mitigation activities, and the establishment of transportation museums. Not all categories of projects are required to receive funding and the program does not specify a certain percentage of funding required for any one particular eligible category.

Currently, the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) has assumed an estimated amount of \$42 million for federal fiscal years 2004, 2005, & 2006 to support the transportation enhancement program. Of the \$42 million, 80 percent was allocated to the state's regional transportation planning organizations (RTPOs) for prioritizing their local needs, while the remaining 20 percent will be used by the state Transportation Enhancement Committee to fund statewide transportation projects and additional regional projects not funded through the RTPO allocations. Under the current process, RTPOs submit funding recommendations to WSDOT, including forwarding the additional projects not selected at the regional level. Ultimately, the final list of enhancement projects is approved by the WSDOT Secretary.

Summary of Bill: When allocating federal surface transportation program enhancement funds, the state Transportation Enhancement Committee and RTPOs must ensure, to the greatest extent practicable, that funding for each transportation enhancement activity is allocated such that the allocation meets or exceeds the national average of allocations made for each of the twelve respective activities.

Beginning December 1, 2007, WSDOT must report to the Legislature every two years on whether the state has met or exceeded the national average of allocations made for each transportation enhancement activity.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Committee/Commission/Task Force Created: No.

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

Testimony For: The total allocation of federal enhancement funds to eligible projects needs to be more balanced. Some groups, like the bicycle and pedestrian associations, have more resources and are more sophisticated with making their voices heard in the allocation process. There are many historic preservation needs around the state and this pot of funding is the largest federal resource available for these types of projects. Progress has been made with respect to a more balanced allocation to other eligible categories out of the statewide projects list, but more still needs to be done to ensure the regional prioritization process includes a balanced list of projects.

Testimony Against: None.

Testimony Other: The bill is too dependent on national averages of project allocations. The bill weakens local control. The allocation process should start locally and move up to the state level, and not have limits placed on the process at the outset by the state.

Who Testified: PRO: Senator Haugen, Sponsor; Mary Thompson, WA Trust for Historic Preservation.

OTHER: Dale Rawcour, WA State Assoc. of County Engineers; Genisie Adkins, Transportation Choices Coalition; Ashley Probart, Assoc. of WA Cities.