
HOUSE BILL 2492

State of Washington

68th Legislature

2024 Regular Session

By Representatives Nance, Ramel, Berry, Couture, Shavers, Eslick, Pollet, Street, Alvarado, and McEntire

1 AN ACT Relating to the creation of the Washington state ferries
2 75 commission; creating new sections; and providing an expiration
3 date.

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

5 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 1.** The legislature finds that on June 1,
6 1951, the state of Washington bought the black ball fleet and
7 commenced providing auto and passenger ferry service on the Puget
8 Sound. By the year 1999, the Washington state ferries reached its
9 peak ridership of 26,800,000 passengers, making the Washington state
10 ferries the world's second largest ferry fleet. During the 21st
11 century, ferry service has endured many challenges relating to
12 financing, aging vessels, labor shortages, and vessel procurement.
13 The legislature further finds that the Washington state ferries has
14 not been adequately resourced to fulfill its vital mission.
15 Therefore, to ensure the financial sustainability and continued
16 excellence of the Washington state ferries, the legislature intends,
17 with the 75th anniversary of state ferry service fast approaching, to
18 establish a commission to evaluate changes to the financing, funding
19 sources, scope of service, and stewardship of the state ferry system
20 by June 1, 2026.

1 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 2.** The joint transportation committee must
2 establish the Washington state ferries 75 commission.

3 (1) The commission must include two appointees each from the
4 house and senate transportation committees, a representative of
5 Washington state ferries, a representative of the governor's office,
6 a representative of labor, and four representatives of ferry
7 dependent communities. The chairs of the house and senate
8 transportation committees must appoint the members representing the
9 house and senate, labor unions, and ferry dependent communities. The
10 commission must elect a chair from amongst its members.

11 (2) The commission must:

12 (a) Evaluate the financing needs and cost structure for
13 Washington state ferries to be able to reliably operate service,
14 including the electrification of vessels in the fleet;

15 (b) Explore financing options to increase dedicated funding
16 options for the ferry system;

17 (c) Identify state and federal funding opportunities and methods
18 to optimize Washington state ferries for eligibility, competitive
19 positioning, and receipt;

20 (d) Evaluate alternative organizational designs and stewardship
21 models to best position Washington state ferries for sustained
22 financial strength and operational excellence;

23 (e) Evaluate whether the scope of service provided by the ferry
24 system is sufficient to meet customers' access to employment,
25 professional services, and multimodal transportation connections,
26 including the need to provide passenger-only ferry service; and

27 (f) Outline the necessary elements of a transition plan and
28 legislation to implement the recommended funding and organizational
29 design structures.

30 (3) The commission must report to the governor and appropriate
31 committees of the legislature as follows:

32 (a) Preliminary findings by January 13, 2025; and

33 (b) Final findings and recommendations by June 1, 2026.

34 (4) This section expires June 1, 2026.

35 NEW SECTION. **Sec. 3.** The Western Washington University center
36 for economic and business research must conduct an economic impact
37 study of reduced ferry service. The study must examine the impacts on
38 a statewide and systemwide basis, on all 10 routes of service
39 provided by the Washington state ferries. The study must include a

1 review of key factors that impact the overall economy of both ferry-
2 served communities and the state economy. To the extent that data is
3 available, the study must address economic impacts on employment,
4 housing, health care costs, emergency response, climate resilience,
5 tourism, and small business. The data must be used to demonstrate the
6 magnitude of hardships and to strengthen the case for additional
7 state and federal funding. The university must submit a report to the
8 office of the governor and the Washington state ferries 75 commission
9 by September 30, 2024.

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