

Ferry Reforms: A Bipartisan Approach to Reforming Our System

Last year the Legislature approved HB 3209 to reform WSF's compensation system to better ensure a sustainably-funded marine highway system. This year the Legislature proposes additional reforms to eliminate waste, improve efficiency and establish parity with other state employee contracts.

Fairness in Bargaining

SB 5405 (Haugen, King) and HB 1511 (Clibborn, Armstrong) prevent certain collective bargaining provisions from being greater than those provided to other general government employees. Among other things, they prohibit:

- Overtime greater than 150 percent of base pay
- Overtime rounding in increments larger than 6 minutes
- Minimum eight-hour lengths for shifts
- Free passage on ferries except for current employees for work purposes

The bills also:

- Abolish interest arbitration
- Define captains as part of WSF management and prohibit them from being members of a union
- Abolish the Marine Employment Commission and transfer its duties into the Public Employment Relations Commission that oversees all other state employee contracts
- Prohibit any DOT manager from belonging to the same bargaining unit representing employees they supervise
- Assign ferry employee claims to the state Department of Labor and Industry, along with all other state employees, instead of the more costly Jones Act

All but about 100 WSF workers are represented by 11 separate unions under nine bargaining agreements. Few decisions are left to management's discretion. **A recent study by WSDOT comparing WSF worker benefits against other general government employees showed that in the 09-11 contracts, WSF employees received about \$6.5 million worth of additional benefits compared to other general government employees.**

Performance Accountability

HB 1516 (Morris) and SB 5406 (Haugen, King) focus on improving performance and cost-efficiency within the ferry system by holding WSF managers more accountable. The bills:

- Establish specific performance measures related to customer satisfaction, on-time performance, employee and customer safety, cost containment, cost-efficient vessel and terminal design, and more
- Require WSF managers to meet or exceed most of the performance measures. If the standards are not met, WSF is directed to competitively contract out, or privatize, management services

Operations Efficiency

As recommended in recent reports from the Joint Transportation Committee, SB 5406 (Haugen, King) and HB 1512 (Armstrong, Clibborn):

- Abolish the Marine Employees Commission and transfer its duties into the Public Employment Relations Commission (estimated annual savings: \$235,000)
- Move state ferry employees under the state's industrial insurance program for on-the-job injuries, along with all other state employees, instead of the federal Jones Act

The bills also increase the bid limit for apprenticeship utilization requirements from \$2.5 million to \$6.0 million for Washington State Ferries only, to increase competition in bids for projects.