

House committee OKs amendment on who sets ferry fares

By John Stang

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OLYMPIA — A key state House committee has approved an amendment that would put authority to set ferry fares and Tacoma Narrows Bridge tolls back in the hands of the Washington Transportation Commission.

The House's Ways and Means Committee on Wednesday approved the amendment offered by state Rep. Larry Seaquist, D-Gig Harbor. The amendment was tacked onto a bill to further trim the deficit in the state's 2009-2011 budget. The bill still has to go to the full House, as well as the Senate. The vote was 16-11 on party lines, with Democrats for the amendment and Republicans against it.

Seaquist's amendment puts the transportation commission back in charge of setting ferry fares as well as tolls for the Narrows Bridge, the State Route 520 corridor and the State Route 167 high-occupancy-lane pilot project.

This move runs counter to an informal Attorney General's Office opinion in December that Initiative 1053, approved by voters last November, makes the Legislature the only body allowed to increase taxes, fares and fees.

Seaquist said his amendment would trump the attorney general's opinion.

I-5053, which also restored a requirement that a two-thirds supermajority vote of the House and Senate is required to pass a new tax, took effect on Dec. 2.



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