

MINUTES
SENATE TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE

DATE: Tuesday, March 02, 2021

TIME: 1:30 P.M.

PLACE: Room WW53

MEMBERS PRESENT: Chair Den Hartog, Vice Chairman Woodward, Senators Winder, Lodge, Rice, Vick, Crabtree, Nelson, and Wintrow

ABSENT/ EXCUSED: None

NOTE: The sign-in sheet, testimonies and other related materials will be retained with the minutes in the committee's office until the end of the session and will then be located on file with the minutes in the Legislative Services Library.

CONVENED: **Chair Den Hartog** called the meeting of the Senate Transportation Committee (Committee) to order at 1:30 p.m.

MINUTES APPROVAL: **Vice Chairman Woodward** moved to approve the Minutes of Thursday, February 18, 2021. **Senator Winder** seconded the motion. The motion carried by **voice vote**.

S 1103 **Relating to the Idaho Air Travel Enhancement Program.** In opening remarks, **Senator Johnson** spoke on the importance of establishing a fund to support new air routes between airports in the State of Idaho. He explained the Idaho Air Travel Enhancement Program Fund will provide incentives for airlines to develop and expand intrastate commercial air travel between communities located in Idaho. There is financial risk involved whenever airlines develop new routes, and the proposed fund will offset the monetary risks involved.

DISCUSSION: **Senator Crabtree** questioned how conflicts between stakeholders will be resolved. **Senator Johnson** clarified that while there were management challenges in the past, they were resolved. He stressed that community and airports are working very hard to establish and support new routes.

Senator Wintrow asked Senator Johnson to explain the role of government in the proposed fund and to clarify what the return would be on such an investment. **Senator Johnson** explained it is difficult for an airline to establish new routes on capital alone, and a dedicated State fund would show support for the effort. An expansion of air service routes could be profitable to the State since it is forecasted to support increases in business as well as inter- and intra-state tourism.

Senator Vick requested clarification on where the \$1 million appropriation and transfer, as specified in the fiscal note, would be derived. He also inquired if the fund will be spent on solely on air service support. **Senator Johnson** acknowledged the Joint Finance-Appropriations Committee will be responsible for identifying where the money would come from, and confirmed the fund would only be used to support air service. **Senator Vick** then questioned if the timing is appropriate for an air travel fund to be established. He cited the airlines' recent difficulties due to COVID-19 and the resulting drastic decrease in air travel. **Senator Johnson** expressed the State needs to be proactive in contacting airlines and approaching them with proposals, rather than waiting. The current air travel landscape provides opportunity for new ventures, and airlines are willing to consider them if potential for profit is demonstrated.

TESTIMONY IN FAVOR: Testifying in favor of **S 1103** were John Watts, Idaho Central Credit Union; Caroline Merritt, Idaho Chamber Alliance; Pam Eaton, Idaho Retailers Association and Idaho Restaurant and Lodging Association; and Joe Stegner, University of Idaho.

MOTION: **Senator Nelson** moved to send **S 1103** to the floor with a **do pass** recommendation. **Senator Lodge** seconded the motion. The motion carried by **voice vote**.

PRESENTATION: **Scott Wold**, Idaho National Laboratory (INL), informed the Committee about the use of artificial intelligence in INL's daily function. Previously, INL would deploy scouts to assess the weather impact on roadway conditions. The scouts would then provide appropriate notifications and recommendations to stakeholders. This reporting process drove the decision-making regarding bus safety and transit routes into INL's purview. It proved difficult to continually assess roadway conditions as they changed frequently and quickly, sometimes quicker than the reporting process could handle. INL decided to integrate a weather sensor network to provide more reliable and accurate near-real time reports of roadway conditions. This change improved the process and provided better forecasting to support safe bus operations.

ADJOURNED: There being no further business at this time, **Chair Den Hartog** adjourned the meeting at 2:38 p.m.

Senator Den Hartog
Chair

Emily Carlisle
Secretary