Legislation Text

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Clerk 06/02/2008

A MOTION relating to King County's use of biofuel blends in transit and fleet vehicles; mandating a report on the life-cycle and economic impacts of utilizing biofuels, and examining the efficacy of alternative climate change mitigation strategies for King County's transportation emissions sources.

WHEREAS, the King County Climate Plan and Climate Report and the executive-proposed King County Comprehensive Plan 2008 update include policy goals for reducing King County's greenhouse gas emissions. As part of these goals, King County must collaborate with local governments in the region to reduce overall emissions to eighty percent below the year 2007 levels by 2050, and

WHEREAS, of the approximately 420,000 metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent that the King County government is estimated to have emitted in 2003, approximately 96,000 metric tons were produced by transit buses. In total, transportation accounts for thirty-eight percent of total greenhouse gas emissions created by King County government operations, and

WHEREAS, hybrid and other new fuel-efficient technologies offer significant promise as a means of reducing vehicle emissions, including carbon dioxide, and

WHEREAS, in March 2006, King County Executive Ron Sims signed Executive Order PUT 7-5 calling for a substantial increase in the biofuel mix utilized by the county's diesel vehicle fleet, from five percent ("B5") to twenty percent ("B20"). King County currently utilizes the B20 biofuel blend, and

WHEREAS, biofuels have come under increasing scrutiny by some mainstream peer-reviewed science journals and other experts. The development and utilization of food-based biofuels might have created two

unintended consequences. First, some biofuels may cause more net greenhouse gas emissions than fossil fuels. Second, some biofuel production and usage may be linked to increasing worldwide food prices, and

WHEREAS, the United States Environmental Protection Agency is conducting research into the full life -cycle impacts of biofuel production, which include total environmental impacts beyond carbon emissions. A life-cycle analysis measures greenhouse gas emissions throughout the land-clearing, planting, growth and harvesting phases of the fuel biomass. Additionally, it covers the manufacture, transportation, distribution and end-use of the end product, and

WHEREAS**,** King County has joined the Chicago Climate Exchange and committed to annually reduce its carbon emissions or purchase equivalent carbon offsets at market rates. Furthermore, one strategy that the county has engaged in to reduce emissions is to use biofuel in its vehicles, and

WHEREAS, the market price of carbon futures, diesel fuel and biodiesel fuel are increasing at unprecedented rates. These external economic drivers impact the financial risk and emissions mitigation strategies associated with the county meeting its carbon reduction commitments through the use of biofuel, and

WHEREAS, additional costs, risks and resources may be unknown for current and future usage of biofuel blends due to rapidly accumulating scientific knowledge;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT MOVED by the Council of King County:

The executive shall transmit to the council, by filing eleven copies of the report with the clerk of the council no later than December 31, 2008, for distribution to all councilmembers, a report analyzing the impacts of biodiesel fuel currently used by King County Metro and other County vehicles. The report shall address the following:

A. The economic impact on King County of utilizing biofuel in its vehicle fleet and meeting its Chicago Climate Exchange membership commitments;

B. Based on federal and other available relevant research, King County's net greenhouse gas emission-equivalent gains or losses from major greenhouse gases such as water vapor, nitrogen oxides, and carbon

dioxide, throughout the entire life-cycle of biofuel production and usage in vehicles;

C. Recommendations for alternatives to utilizing food-based biofuel sources in the King County vehicle fleet, including technologies such as hybrid fuel cells, plug-in hybrid electric vehicles ("PHEVs"), battery electric vehicles and additional carbon offset purchases, and the evaluation of local and regional alternative fuel supply options; and

D. A forecast analysis of King County's future carbon reduction commitments, goals and revenues, as guided by the 2007 Climate Plan.