

SB 256 STAFF MEASURE SUMMARY

Senate Committee On Business and Transportation

Action Date: 02/15/17

Action: Do pass and refer to Ways and Means by prior reference.

Vote: 5-0-0-0

Yeas: 5 - Beyer, Girod, Monroe, Riley, Thomsen

Fiscal: Fiscal impact issued

Revenue: Has minimal revenue impact

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WHAT THE MEASURE DOES:

Establishes the Willamette Falls Locks Commission (Commission) as a policy-making and advisory board for issues relating to the repair, reopening, operation, maintenance and future transfer of ownership of the Willamette River navigational channel and locks system. Establishes the Willamette Falls Navigation Infrastructure Program to provide staff support and assistance to the Commission. Establishes the Willamette Falls Navigation Infrastructure Program Account and appropriates \$677,500 from the General Fund into the Account. Sunsets all three programs on December 31, 2023. Declares emergency, effective on passage.

ISSUES DISCUSSED:

- History of the Willamette Falls Locks
- Historical and cultural importance
- Potential economic, recreational and tourism opportunities upon locks reopening
- Short window of opportunity to prevent loss of the locks
- Membership and staffing of the Commission

EFFECT OF AMENDMENT:

No amendment.

BACKGROUND:

The historic Willamette Falls Locks were constructed in the early 1870s to allow river traffic to navigate around the 40-foot, horseshoe-shaped basalt ridge between Oregon City and West Linn on the Willamette River. The locks opened in 1873 and passed through the hands of numerous owners before being purchased by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in 1915. The locks were placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1974, and were declared non-operational in December 2011.

Each of the system's four locks is approximately 210 feet long and 40 feet wide. When in operation, the locks varied in lift distance from 20.5 feet (Lock #1, the farthest downstream) to 9.3 feet (Lock #4, the farthest upstream).