

Senate Transportation Committee

Peter O'Neill 271-4151

SB 186-FN, relative to an electric bicycle low-income transportation incentive program and making an appropriation therefor.

Hearing Date: January 31, 2023

Time Opened: 4:04 p.m.

Time Closed: 4:30 p.m.

Members of the Committee Present: Senators Ricciardi, Watters, Ward, Gendreau and Fenton

Members of the Committee Absent: None

Bill Analysis: This bill creates an electric bicycle incentive and rebate program and fund for low income workers and makes an appropriation to the fund.

Sponsors:

Sen. Watters

Sen. Prentiss

Sen. Perkins Kwoka

Sen. Soucy

Sen. Fenton

Rep. Sykes

Rep. Tellez

Who supports the bill: Sen. Watters, Sen. Perkins Kwoka, Sen. Fenton, Rebecca Ohler; Department of Environmental Services, David Topham, Patricia Beffa-Negrini, Susan Liebowitz, Susan Richman, Judith Saum, Anne Thomas, Anne Grossi, Catherine Bushueff, Jeanne Torpey, Barbara Southard, Andrew Jones, Gary Devore, Nancy Brennan, Claudia Damon, Patricia Martin, Lisa Sweet, Susan Moore, Tom St. Martin, Lois Cote, A. Thomas, Gregory Davis, Joseph Kwasniuk, Nancy Bishop, Melissa, Hinebauch, Judith Johnson, Alfrieda Englund, Sharon Racusin, Nancy Greenwood, Ann Rettew, Carla Billingham

Who opposes the bill: Julie Smith

Who is neutral on the bill: None

Summary of Testimony Presented:

Senator Watters District 4

- Sen. Watters introduced SB 186 and spoke in favor of it.
- He said he had a replace all amendment that might address the fiscal note problem with the bill.

- There could be an opportunity to increase use of transportation and potentially help with worker shortage by establishing an electric bike program. They are very affordable and are usually about \$1000 or less.
- Cargo bikes are a bit heavier so they are slower and more expensive. However, they have an adaptable frame that can help with businesses transporting goods.
- There is a national standard in statute for E bikes. There are three different levels of bikes, how they work, licensure requirements, and other details to note. E bike owners do not need a license for electric bikes that go under 25 miles per hour. The bikes assist the rider so that the speed is maintained safely.
- The program would set up an incentive for low income folks.
- There is a worker shortage problem. The e bikes could be seen as a solution to the shortage and could help with work force development.
- Vermont did the same type of program thing and it was proven successful.
- E bikes could also help cut air pollution.
- Community action partnership programs would help to identify people eligible for this program and administer the e bikes to people who could take advantage of this program.
- Most of the fiscal note is with the community action partnership aiding with the program.
- Sen. Watters said he had conversations with DES and clean energy NH about the program as well.
- Under RSA 259:27-a, these e bikes won't require a license.
- Participating retailers would accept vouchers from people and safety equipment would be given to people utilizing the e bikes.
- The program would be standard, establish parameters of the program, and would see income come from it.
- There would also be a registered data base to keep track of who is using the program and help to protect against bike theft.
- Applicants would be approved by a selection process once the e bike rebates were finished.
- If the e bikes are not sold by a certain period of time, then there would need to be a second look about what to do with this bill.
- There may only be enough for 50 people in this program.
- This would be low-cost transportation and wouldn't need the riders to have a license.
- In a way, if the expenditures can be covered, finance can decide if there will be some state money.

- Sen. Ward clarified that the program would be about \$100,000 for first fiscal year and said it sounds like this would be a full program. This would be about people that could apply.
 - Sen. Watters said maybe 100 people could apply.
 - Sen. Ward asked how this program would continue. Would there be a way to test this program or test the bikes. She asked where the money would come from.
 - Sen. Watters said in terms of the coordinator, that would be covered. In the amendment that he had mentioned, the community action partnership of Strafford County would handle the program at no cost. Other venues have shown success with these programs and this would be a pilot program. Federal funding could be made available as well through due to various bills that have been passed already. Using these bikes would not require training because they are bicycles. Users need to respect rules of the road. Municipalities have full enforcement over them as well.
 - Sen. Ward asked about the speed of the bike. How fast could they go.
 - Sen. Watters said RSA 259 outlines eligible bikes. There is a three-tier class for electric bikes in statute. If they go over a certain mph, they are no longer a bike. In this program, they are classified as bikes.
- Ricciardi asked what would happen if someone took a bike but left their job voluntarily.
 - Sen. Watters said people will be vetted for this process. People could get these bikes to help with their business. There are instances where people might leave their job but the vetting process would be there to address that.
 - Sen. Ricciardi said the intent would be to help the work force so a spot in the program should be for people in the work force.
 - Sen. Watters said that is why we are here. Someone might not be able to find affordable housing through their job so they would need to jump ship to find something else.
 - Sen. Ricciardi asked what Strafford County was doing.
 - Sen. Watters said funding and administering the program.
- Sen. Ward asked if something went wrong with the bike how would it be repaired.
 - Sen. Watters said it is like with any vehicle. It is cheaper to get a car fixed and bikes are low maintenance. They are built to be tough, especially the cargo version bikes.
 - Sen. Ward asked how long a battery could hold a charge for.

- Sen. Watters said the battery can hold a charge for about 80 miles. The battery can be taken off and plugged in for an even better charge too.

Rebecca Ohler, Department of Environmental Services

- Mrs. Ohler said she was present to answer questions/
- Sen. Watters asked if Clean Energy New Hampshire and the Department of Environmental Services would be able to work with Strafford County partnerships to out issues with the bill.
 - Mrs. Ohler said yes, the Department would coordinate with external partners. E bikes are very viable options for 15-20 mile commutes. She said she had been seeing bikes on the street year round now.
 - Sen. Watters said finding grant funding to support the program would be beneficial too.
 - Mrs. Ohler said agreed, especially in the short term.
- Sen. Ricciardi asked if DES could help with the funding plan for the bill.
 - Mrs. Ohler said DES is not able to do much outside the scope of funding stated in the bill. Sen. Watters had already lined up Strafford County to help.
 - Sen. Ricciardi said she would like to see something planned out instead of having things fall where they may.
 - Sen. Watters said if the program doesn't get authorized, it won't be developed. Vermont has a similar plan which made a good guideline.
 - Sen. Ricciardi said then she wanted the bill to reflect that plan.

Ki May Wong, Department of Revenue Administrations

- Mr. Wong said the DRA was tasked to audit the applications and submitted the fiscal note for the bill.
- There might need to be additional people and staff overseeing this audit since the DRA had never done an audit for e bikes before.
- Mr. Wong said the DRA was willing to assist and conduct an audit should the bill pass.
- Sen. Watters said he though about removing the requirement to audit. Thanked the work for the fiscal note. Change auto commission. Points made in fiscal note were very clear.