

**BEFORE THE WASHINGTON
UTILITIES AND TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION**

In the Matter of Determining the Proper
Carrier Classification of and Complaint
for Penalties Against:

HIGH SOCIETY TRANSPORTATION
LLC

DOCKET TE-250026

ORDER 01

ORDER INSTITUTING SPECIAL
PROCEEDING; COMPLAINT SEEKING
TO IMPOSE PENALTIES; NOTICE OF
HEARING

(Set for March 26, 2025, at 1:30 p.m.)

INTRODUCTION

- 1 The Washington Utilities and Transportation Commission (Commission), pursuant to Revised Code of Washington (RCW) 81.04.510, institutes this special proceeding on its own motion to determine whether High Society Transportation LLC (High Society or Company) has engaged, and is engaging, in unlawful operations without a charter party and excursion service carrier certificate in violation of RCW 81.70.220.
- 2 The Commission has information from which it believes and therefore alleges that High Society has advertised, solicited, offered, or entered into one or more agreements to provide charter party or excursion carrier service within the state of Washington without having first obtained a charter party and excursion service carrier certificate.
- 3 Pursuant to RCW 81.04.510, upon proof of these allegations, the Commission is authorized to issue an order requiring High Society to cease and desist activities subject to regulation under Title 81 RCW. In addition, RCW 81.04.110 authorizes the Commission to file a complaint on its own motion setting forth any act or omission by High Society that violates any law, or any order or rule of the Commission. The Commission may impose financial penalties of up to \$5,000 for each violation.
- 4 At the hearing in this special proceeding that will be conducted pursuant to Part IV of the Administrative Procedure Act (APA), chapter 34.05 RCW, of which notice is given here, the Commission will also consider its Complaint against High Society alleging violations of law as specified below and will decide whether High Society should be penalized.

ORDER AND NOTICE OF HEARING

5 The Commission has jurisdiction to institute a special proceeding to determine whether High Society is conducting business requiring operating authority or has performed or is performing any act requiring Commission approval without securing such approval pursuant to RCW 80.01.040, RCW 81.01.010, and RCW 81.04.510. In addition to the foregoing statutes, this matter involves Title 81 RCW, including but not limited to RCW 81.04.020 and RCW 81.70.220. This matter also involves the administrative rules set forth in chapter 480-30 and 480-07 Washington Administrative Code (WAC).

6 **THE COMMISSION ORDERS that High Society appear virtually before the Commission in this special proceeding conducted under the authority of RCW 81.04.510 at 1:30 p.m., on March 26, 2025,** to give testimony and evidence under oath as to its operations. The burden of proving that the alleged operations are not subject to the provisions of Title 81 RCW shall be upon High Society, as provided by RCW 81.04.510.

7 To attend the hearing telephonically, you may call (253) 215-8782 and enter Meeting ID: 872 5663 8909# and Passcode: 605674#. If you wish to attend via Zoom, please email Kathryn.mcpherson@utc.wa.gov and a link will be provided to you.

8 **THE COMMISSION GIVES NOTICE THAT ANY PARTY WHO FAILS TO ATTEND OR PARTICIPATE IN THE HEARING SET BY THIS NOTICE, OR ANY OTHER STAGE OF THIS PROCEEDING, MAY BE HELD IN DEFAULT IN ACCORDANCE WITH RCW 34.05.440 AND WAC 480-07-450.**

9 If a limited English-speaking or hearing-impaired party needs an interpreter, a form is attached to this notice to be filled out and returned as indicated, so that a qualified interpreter may be appointed at no cost to the party or witness.

10 The names and mailing addresses of all parties and their known representatives are shown as follows:

Carrier: Brandon Russell
High Society
302 W 5th Street, Unit A
Cle Elum, WA 98922
brandon@highsocietytransportation.com

Representative: Unknown

Commission: Washington Utilities and
Transportation Commission
P.O. Box 47250
Olympia, WA 98504-7250
(360) 664-1160

Representative: Kathryn McPherson
Compliance Investigator
P.O. Box 47250
Olympia, WA 98504-7250
(360) 867-8305
kathryn.mcpherson@utc.wa.gov

COMPLAINT SEEKING PENALTIES

PARTIES

- 11 Complainant, the Commission, is an agency of the state of Washington, authorized by state law to regulate the rates, services, facilities, and practices of public service companies, including charter party or excursion service carriers, under the provisions of Title 81 RCW.
- 12 Respondent, High Society, is a charter party or excursion service carrier that does business in the state of Washington.

JURISDICTION

- 13 The Commission has jurisdiction over this matter pursuant to RCW 80.01.040, RCW 81.04.110, RCW 81.01.010, RCW 81.04.160, RCW 81.04.460, and chapter 81.70 RCW.

BACKGROUND

- 14 According to the Declaration of the Commission compliance investigator presented to the undersigned administrative law judge¹ under penalty of perjury, the following facts establish probable cause for the Commission to complain against the activities of High Society and to seek penalties in accordance with applicable law.

¹ Administrative law judges appointed by the Commission are empowered, among other things, to “make findings of probable cause and issue complaints in the name of the commission.” RCW 80.01.060(1).

15 According to evidence obtained from High Society’s Facebook page, Yelp advertisements, and two separate advertisements found on separate websites, High Society has been operating as a charter party or excursion service carrier within the state of Washington without a certificate.

16 On or about January 8, 2025, High Society offered to provide charter party or excursion carrier service without first having obtained a certificate from the Commission.

APPLICABLE LAW AND REGULATION

17 Under state law, the definition of “charter party carrier” includes every person engaged in the transportation over any public highways in this state of a group of persons who, pursuant to a common purpose and under a single contract, acquire the use of a motor vehicle to travel together as a group to a specified destination or for a particular itinerary, either agreed upon in advance or modified by the chartered group after leaving the place of origin.²

18 Under state law, the definition of charter party carrier includes a person who “advertises, solicits, offers, or enters into an agreement to carry passengers over any public highway within the state of Washington.”³

19 The term “person” can mean a corporation or firm as well as an individual.⁴ Specifically included in this term are individuals, firms, corporations, associations, partnerships, lessees, receivers, trustees, consortiums, joint venture, or commercial entities.⁵

20 The term “charter party carrier” or “charter carrier” means every person engaged in the transportation over any public highways in this state of a group of persons who, pursuant to a common purpose and under a single contract, acquire the use of a motor vehicle to travel together as a group to a specified destination or for a particular itinerary, either agreed upon in advance or modified by the chartering group after leaving the place of origin. A person who is engaged in the transportation of persons by party bus over any public highway in this state is considered

² RCW 81.70.020(1).

³ RCW 81.70.220(1).

⁴ RCW 81.70.020(9).

⁵ WAC 480-30-036.

engaging in the business of a charter party carrier or excursion service carrier.⁶

21 Charter party and excursion service carriers are common carriers.⁷ For the purposes of Title 81 RCW, every common carrier is a public service company.⁸

22 It is illegal to engage in business as a charter party or excursion service carrier within the state of Washington after a carrier's certificate has been canceled by the Commission.⁹

23 Any person who engages in business as a charter party or excursion service carrier in the state of Washington after its certificate has been canceled is subject to a penalty of up to \$5,000 per violation.¹⁰ If the basis for the violation is advertising, each advertisement reproduced, broadcast, or displayed via a particular medium constitutes a separate violation.¹¹

24 The Commission is authorized to file a complaint on its own motion setting forth any act or omission by any public service company that violates any law or any order or rule of the Commission.¹²

COMPLAINT

25 The Commission, through its Staff, re-alleges the statements contained in paragraphs 14 through 24 above.

26 High Society has violated RCW 81.70.220(1) at least four times by advertising to transport passengers without first having obtained a certificate from the Commission.

27 High Society has violated RCW 81.70.220(1) at least once by offering charter party or excursion carrier service to transport passengers without first having obtained a certificate from the Commission.

⁶ WAC 480-30-036.

⁷ RCW 81.04.010(11).

⁸ RCW 81.04.010.

⁹ RCW 81.70.260(1).

¹⁰ RCW 81.70.260(2).

¹¹ RCW 81.70.260(1).

¹² RCW 81.04.110.

REQUEST FOR RELIEF

28 Staff requests that the Commission, pursuant to its authority under RCW 81.70.220(2), assess penalties of up to \$5,000 per violation against High Society. Staff will present testimonial evidence at the hearing to address the factors for determining an appropriate penalty amount. Further, Staff may request that some portion of any penalty actually imposed be suspended for a period of time sufficient to demonstrate High Society's intent to comply with all applicable laws and rules governing the charter party and excursion service carrier industry.

PROBABLE CAUSE

29 Based on a review of the Declaration of the Commission compliance investigator assigned to this matter, and consistent with RCW 80.01.060 and WAC 480-07-307, the Commission finds probable cause exists to issue this Complaint.

NOTICE OF HEARING

30 **THE COMMISSION GIVES NOTICE THAT it will conduct a virtual hearing concerning this Complaint concurrently with the special proceeding noticed above, which will commence at 1:30 p.m., on March 26, 2025.**

31 To attend the hearing telephonically, you may call (253) 215-8782, enter Meeting ID: 872 5663 8909# and enter Passcode: 605674#. If you wish to attend via Zoom, please email kathryn.mcpherson@utc.wa.gov and a link will be provided to you.

32 Administrative Law Judge Bijan Hughes, from the Commission's Administrative Law Division, is designated to preside at the hearing of these matters.¹³

DATED at Lacey, Washington, and effective February 18, 2025.

/s/ James E. Brown II

James E. Brown II
Acting Director, Administrative Law
Division

¹³ Judge Hughes can be reached by telephone at (360) 664-1254 or by email at bijan.hughes@utc.wa.gov.

Inquiries should be addressed to:

Jeff Killip
Executive Director and Secretary
Washington Utilities and Transportation Commission
P.O. Box 47250
Olympia, WA 98504-7250
(360) 664-1160

NOTICE

Hearing facilities are accessible to persons with disabilities and persons who do not speak English as a first language. If limited English-speaking, hearing-impaired parties or witnesses are involved in a hearing and need an interpreter, a qualified interpreter will be appointed at no cost to the party or witness.

If you need an interpreter, or have other special needs, please provide the information requested below via email to Stacey Brewster, paralegal, at stacey.brewster@utc.wa.gov:

(PLEASE SUPPLY ALL REQUESTED INFORMATION)

Docket: _____

Case Name: _____

Hearing Date: _____ Hearing Location: _____

Primary Language: _____

Hearing Impaired: (Yes) _____ (No) _____

Do you need a certified sign language interpreter?

Visual _____ Tactile _____

Other type of assistance needed: _____

English-speaking person who can be contacted if there are questions:

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone No.: (____) _____