BEFORE THE WASHINGTON
UTILITIES AND TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

In the Matter of Determining the Proper Carrier Classification of, and Complaint for Penalties Against: TASTE OF THE VALLEY, LLC	DOCKET TE-260590 ORDER 01 ORDER INSTITUTING SPECIAL PROCEEDING; COMPLAINT SEEKING TO IMPOSE PENALTIES; NOTICE OF VIRTUAL PREHEARING CONFERENCE **(Set for November 20, 2026, at 9:30 a.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 Taste of the Valley, LLC (Taste of the Valley or Company) has engaged, or is engaging, in unlawful operations following the cancelation of its charter party and excursion service carrier certificate in violation of RCW 81.70.260.

2 The Commission has information from which it believes and therefore alleges that Taste of the Valley has advertised, solicited, offered, or entered into one or more agreements to provide charter party or excursion carrier service within the state of Washington following the cancelation of its charter party and excursion service carrier certificate in Docket TE-250968 on December 18, 2025.

3 Pursuant to RCW 81.04.510, upon proof of these allegations, the Commission is authorized to issue an order requiring Taste of the Valley 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 Taste of the Valley 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 Taste of the Valley alleging violations of law as specified below and will decide whether Taste of the Valley should be penalized.

COMPLAINT SEEKING PENALTIES

5 **Parties.** 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.

6 Respondent, Taste of the Valley, is a charter party or excursion service carrier that does business in the state of Washington. Todd Steel is the owner of Taste of the Valley.

7 **Jurisdiction.** The Commission has jurisdiction over this matter pursuant to RCW 80.01.040, RCW 81.01.010, RCW 81.04.110, RCW 81.04.160, RCW 81.04.460, RCW 81.04.510, RCW 81.70.220, and RCW 81.70.260.

8 **Background.** According to the Declaration of the Commission compliance investigator, presented to the undersigned administrative law judge[1] under penalty of perjury, the following facts establish probable cause for the Commission to complain against the activities of Taste of the Valley and to seek penalties in accordance with applicable law.

9 On December 18, 2025, the Commission canceled Taste of the Valley's certificate of authority.[2]

10 On or about July 7, 2026, Staff identified advertisements on Taste of the Valley's website, Facebook page, and Instagram account to provide charter party or excursion service without having first obtained a certificate from the Commission.[3]

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[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).

[2] Declaration of Kathryn McPherson (McPherson Decl.) at ¶ 5.

[3] McPherson Decl. at ¶¶ 8-10.

11 On or about July 7, 2026, Taste of the Valley offered to provide charter party or excursion carrier service after its certificate was voluntarily canceled[4] and without first having obtained a new certificate from the Commission.[5]

12 Specifically, on or about July 7, 2026, using a fictitious name, Commission staff (Staff) emailed the Company requesting a quote for service for 12 passengers on a wine tour for August 22, 2026. The Company responded to Staff's email and emailed a quote which stated that a four-hour wine tour would cost $900.[6]

13 The Company did not possess a valid certificate to operate as a charter and excursion company for hire at any point during any of these encounters.

APPLICABLE LAW AND REGULATION

14 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."[7]

15 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."[8]

16 The term "person" can mean a corporation or firm as well as an individual.[9] Specifically included in this term are individuals, firms, corporations, associations, partnerships, lessees, receivers, trustees, consortiums, joint venture, or commercial entities.[10]

17 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

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[4] McPherson Decl. at ¶ 6.

[5] McPherson Decl. at ¶ 11.

[6] McPherson Decl. at ¶ 11.

[7] RCW 81.70.020(1).

[8] RCW 81.70.220(1).

[9] RCW 81.70.020(9).

[10] WAC 480-30-036.

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 engaging in the business of a charter party carrier or excursion service carrier.[11]

18 Charter party and excursion service carriers are common carriers.[12] For the purposes of Title 81 RCW, every common carrier is a public service company.[13]

19 It is illegal to engage in business as a charter party or excursion service carrier within the state of Washington without first obtaining a certificate issued by the Commission.[14] Engaging in business includes advertising, soliciting, offering, or entering into an agreement to provide such service.[15]

20 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.[16] If the basis for the violation is advertising, each advertisement reproduced, broadcast, or displayed via a particular medium constitutes a separate violation.[17]

21 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.[18]

COMPLAINT

22 The Commission, through its Staff, re-alleges the statements contained in paragraphs 5 through 21 above.

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[11] WAC 480-30-036.

[12] RCW 81.04.010(11).

[13] RCW 81.04.010.

[14] RCW 81.70.260(1).

[15] RCW 81.70.220(1).

[16] RCW 81.70.260(2).

[17] RCW 81.70.260(1).

[18] RCW 81.04.110.

23 Taste of the Valley has violated RCW 81.70.260(1) at least once by offering charter party or excursion carrier service to transport passengers after its certificate was canceled by the Commission.

24 Taste of the Valley has violated RCW 81.70.260(1) at least three times by advertising on its website, on Facebook, and on Instagram after its certificate was canceled by the Commission.

REQUEST FOR RELIEF

25 Staff requests that the Commission, pursuant to its authority under RCW 81.70.260(2), assess penalties of up to $5,000 per violation, for a total of 4 violations totaling $20,000, against Taste of the Valley. Staff will present testimonial and documentary evidence at an evidentiary hearing to address the factors for determining an appropriate penalty amount. Further, Staff may request that some portion of any penalty imposed be suspended for a period of time sufficient to demonstrate Taste of the Valley's intent to comply with all applicable laws and rules governing the charter party and excursion service carrier industry.

PROBABLE CAUSE

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

ORDER AND NOTICE OF VIRTUAL PREHEARING CONFERENCE

27 The Commission has jurisdiction to institute a special proceeding to determine whether Aladin Limousine 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, RCW 81.70.220, and RCW 81.70.260. This matter also involves the administrative rules set forth in chapter 480-30 WAC and chapter 480-07 WAC.

28 **THE COMMISSION GIVES NOTICE That it will hold a virtual prehearing conference in this matter at 9:30 a.m. on November 20, 2026. To attend via Zoom,**

please join the proceeding.[19] To attend by phone, please call (253) 215-8782 and enter the Meeting ID: 853 0743 8700# and Passcode: 280320#.

29 The purpose of the prehearing conference is to consider requests for intervention, resolve scheduling matters including establishing dates for distributing evidence, identify the issues in the proceeding, and determine other matters to assist the Commission in resolving the matter, as listed in WAC 480-07-430.

30 **INTERVENTION**: Persons who wish to intervene should file a petition to intervene in writing at least three business days before the date of the prehearing conference. See WAC 480-07-355(a). The Commission will consider oral petitions to intervene during the conference, **but strongly prefers written petitions to intervene**. Party representatives must file a notice of appearance with the Commission no later than the business day before the conference. See WAC 480-07-345(2). Parties with more than one representative must identify one individual as the "lead" for purposes of official service. Any party or witness in need of an interpreter or other assistance should fill out the form attached to this notice and return it to the Commission. The Commission will set the time and place for any evidentiary hearings at the prehearing conference, on the record of a later conference or hearing session, or by later written notice.

31 **THE COMMISSION GIVES NOTICE** that any party who fails to attend or participate in the prehearing conference set by this Notice, or any other stage of this proceeding, may be held in default under RCW 34.05.440 and WAC 480-07-450.

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

Carrier:	Todd Steel Taste of the Valley, LLC P.O. Box 2132 Tacoma, WA 98401 (253) 759-2287 chelanvalleytaste@gmail.com
Representative:	Unknown
Commission:	Washington Utilities and Transportation Commission P.O. Box 47250

[19] https://utc-wa-gov.zoom.us/j/85307438700?pwd=B2SqStCVzkBIspIhYcYhmRFIiFzqA3.1

Olympia, WA 98504-7250
(360) 664-1160

Representative: Josephine Strauss
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33 Administrative Law Judge Connor Thompson, from the Commission's Administrative Law Division, is designated to preside at the hearing of these matters.[20]

34 The Commission will give parties notice of any other procedural phase of the proceeding in writing or on the record, as appropriate during this proceeding.

35 DATED at Lacey, Washington, and effective September 2, 2026.

/s/ Connor Thompson
CONNOR THOMPSON
Director, Administrative Law Division

Inquiries should be addressed to:

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[20] ALJ Thompson can be reached by telephone at (360) 664-1346 or by email at connor.thompson@utc.wa.gov.