

- b) Pearl Harbor survivors;
 - c) Recipients of the Army, Navy, and Air Force Medals of Honor, the Army Distinguished Service Cross, and the Navy and Air Force Crosses;
 - d) Former American prisoners of war;
 - e) Recipients of the Congressional Medal of Honor; and,
 - f) Recipients of the Purple Heart.
- 2) Requires the vehicle to be registered to a transponder or other electronic toll payment device account with an issuing toll agency.

COMMENTS:

- 1) *Purpose of the bill.* According to the author, “the minimum wage for California is \$15 an hour. Meanwhile, the toll road from the Bay Area to Sacramento is \$14 roundtrip, which could be someone’s entire hour’s salary. AB 2949 requires that a vehicle displaying one of the specified veteran’s plates be exempted from tolls or other charges on toll roads or bridges.

“Veterans who are disabled, survived Pearl Harbor, a Medal of Honor or Purple Heart recipient, or a former Prisoner of War face enough difficulties after their military service. By exempting these veterans from toll charges, we will provide assistance to those who sacrificed for us in service.”

- 2) *What is covered?* The bill applies to tolls and other charges on toll roads, toll bridges, toll highways, vehicular crossings or other toll facilities, except HOT lanes.
- 3) *Who is covered?* The bill does not excuse all veterans from paying tolls. Rather, it exempts vehicles displaying special license plates that can only be obtained by veterans who meet specific, additional criteria and can provide official documentation of their status to the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV). Specifically, these special plates are available to veterans who have been prisoners of war, veterans who survived the attack on Pearl Harbor, veterans who have been severely disabled in the course of their service, and veterans who have received particular distinctions (e.g., the Purple Heart, the Congressional Medal of Honor). As these examples suggest, the special plate requirement limits the scope of the bill to a small subset of California veterans. According to the DMV, there are 34,365 disabled veterans and 5,580 other

individuals with specialized license plates that would the specifications in this bill.

- 4) *How would it work?* Toll systems in California rely on a few methods for registering a person's use of a toll facility and payment of the tolls. First, is via a vehicle-mounted toll tag or sticker transponder that is read by antennae and associated electronically to a person's FasTrak account. Second, license plate readers are cameras that are positioned in various entrances and/or exits to the toll lane or bridge to record images of your license plate as a vehicle passes and tolls are assessed electronically to a person's account or to a one-time payment transaction. Additionally, on a handful of toll bridges, if a person has no transponder, the license plate information can be used to send a toll invoice to the registered owner of the vehicle.

For vehicles that are exempt from tolls, like certain emergency vehicles, under current law, the public agency that owns and operates the vehicle can enter into an agreement with the toll agencies to identify the eligible vehicles via license plates. The toll agencies set up a so-called "non-revenue" account with the public agency, free of charge, and register the license plates for plate readers and may issue transponders for use. This way the public agency is not issued a toll invoice for use of the facilities. Recent amendments to AB 2949 would set up a similar system for the eligible veterans. The bill would require veterans to register their qualifying license plate to a transponder or other electronic toll payment account with an issuing toll agency. This can be done free of charge. Additionally, the toll agencies in California have reciprocity with other California toll agencies, so one registration would work for all toll facilities in California.

- 5) *Cost impact on toll facilities.* It is unclear what the financial impact would be on toll agencies. However, according to the Assembly Appropriations Committee, "there are 34,365 disabled veteran's plates currently in circulation. In addition, there is a much smaller number of plates in circulation that are also available to veterans only, such as plates available to former prisoners of war and plates available to recipients of the Congressional Medal of Honor. If 10% of the roughly 40,000 vehicles with such "veterans" plates made four roundtrip journeys each year from the Bay Area to Sacramento—a trip the author describes as costing \$14 in tolls—then local toll authorities would forego \$224,000 each year, an amount the state might be required to reimburse."

Additional costs could arise from the initial implementation of the bill, including setting up the accounts and mailing transponders to eligible veterans. There is a concern about potential long term consequences. As noted, current

law only allows emergency vehicles responding to an emergency to be exempt from paying tolls. AB 2949 creates an exemption that is not based on a specific need for use of the toll facilities. As such, the bill may open the door to additional toll exemptions.

- 6) *Double Referral.* This bill is double referred to the Senate Military and Veterans Affairs Committee.

RELATED/PREVIOUS LEGISLATION:

SB 1259 (Runner, 2016) – Would have exempted vehicles displaying specialized veteran license plates from toll payments. *This bill died in Assembly Veterans Affairs Committee.*

AB 254 (Jeffries, Chapter 425, Statutes of 2009) – Exempted emergency vehicles, as specified, engaged in emergency response from toll payment.

FISCAL EFFECT: Appropriation: No Fiscal Com.: Yes Local: Yes

POSITIONS: (Communicated to the committee before noon on Wednesday, June 8.)

SUPPORT:

American Legion Department of California
California State Commanders Veterans Council
City of Vallejo Mayor Robert McConnell
Commanders Veterans Council
Military Officers Association of America, California Council of Chapters
Save Our Seniors Network
Vietnam Veterans of America, California State Council
4 private individuals

OPPOSITION:

None received