

CONCURRENCE IN SENATE AMENDMENTS

AB 971 (Lee)

As Amended August 17, 2023

Majority vote

SUMMARY

Clarifies local authorities existing authority to permit other vehicles in transit-only traffic lanes.

Senate Amendments

Requires the agency with jurisdiction over the highway or a public transit agency to place and maintain signs and traffic control devices indicating that a portion of highway is designated as a transit-only traffic lane and requires the public transit agency with agreement from the agency with jurisdiction over the highway to develop the previously mentioned signs and traffic control devices.

COMMENTS

California's transportation sector accounts for about 50% of the state's greenhouse gas emissions, nearly 80% of nitrogen oxide pollution, and 90% of diesel particulate matter pollution.

Transitioning the transportation sector to low-carbon fuels and zero and near-zero emission technologies is critical to achieving climate change goals and clean air standards. However, the State must also consider strategies for reducing sole-occupancy use of cars.

The utilization of mass transit is a major component of the state's strategy to reach its goal of carbon neutrality by 2045. According to the California Air Resource Board's (CARB) 2022 Scoping Plan, including the transition to cleaner vehicles and low-carbon fuels, the path to carbon neutrality by 2045 also depends on reducing the amount people drive or vehicle miles traveled (VMT). CARB identified the need to double the capacity and service frequencies of the existing local public transit networks by 2030, including having transit stops much closer to where people need to go and to provide reliable, shorter frequencies.

Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) is a high-capacity, lower-cost public transit service that effectively accommodates longer-distance passenger trips by designating a road or highway lane for the exclusive use of public transit buses. This strategy has gained in popularity due to its success in reducing the time transit buses spend stuck on congested roads. Several public transit agencies in California are currently operating or constructing BRT projects utilizing exclusive bus-only lanes, including the Alameda-Contra Costa Transit District (AC Transit), the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority, Omnitrans in San Bernardino County, the Sacramento Regional Transit District, the San Diego Metropolitan Transit System, and the Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority (VTA).

According to *Best Practices in Implementing Tactical Transit Lanes*, a guide produced by UCLA ITS, transit-only lanes have been able to improve peak congestion travel times by 20-28%. These lanes can produce dramatic decreases in the variability of transit travel times. Research suggests that reducing the total amount of time it takes a transit rider to go door-to-door by 5-15% can increase urban peak ridership by 2-9%.

Similar to BRT, other types of mixed use lanes in dense urban areas and high-traffic streets can increase transit speeds, reduce congestion, increase ridership, and increase person throughput.

These types of lanes sometimes are more permissive and will allow private buses, shuttles, bicycles, and taxis in the lanes. As an example, the city of San Francisco operates over 43 miles of dedicated transit lanes exclusive to public transit and taxi use.

For both BRT and mixed-use transit lanes, state law requires local authorities to place and maintain signs that inform drivers about which vehicles are permitted in the lanes and at what times. These lanes are enforced through traffic signs, local police departments, transit agencies, and sometimes cameras. The Manual for Traffic Control Devices has approved signage permitting the use of other vehicles in transit only lanes, including taxis.

According to the Author

Dedicated transit lanes incentivize people to use public transit by avoiding unnecessary traffic. Sustainable transportation utilization results in fewer cars on the road, less noise pollution, and healthier communities. California's Vehicle code definition of public mass transit leaves out modes of transportation that can help cities meet their sustainable transportation and traffic-reduction goals, such as services that do not charge a fee. AB 971 will authorize cities to implement and manage bus lanes on their local streets, as well as incentivize local shuttles provided on a fare-free basis, commuter shuttles provided by transportation management associations, and private employee commuter shuttles.

Arguments in Support

While the city of Mountain View, the sponsor of this bill, already has the authority to permit high occupancy vehicles in their transit only lanes, they believe additional clarity is necessary for existing law. They argue "To promote high-occupancy vehicle travel to meet sustainable transportation goals, cities like ours are undertaking projects to implement and expand dedicated mass-transit lanes. Mountain View is currently in the process of completing a dedicated reversible-transit lane that will allow for qualified operators of a transit bus to utilize this dedicated lane, which will change to accommodate heavy traffic moving in one direction at certain times of the day and the opposite direction at others."

Arguments in Opposition

None received

FISCAL COMMENTS

None.

VOTES:**ASM TRANSPORTATION: 15-0-0**

YES: Friedman, Vince Fong, Berman, Juan Carrillo, Davies, Gipson, Hart, Jackson, Kalra, Lowenthal, Stephanie Nguyen, Sanchez, Wallis, Ward, Wicks

ASSEMBLY FLOOR: 77-0-3

YES: Addis, Aguiar-Curry, Alanis, Alvarez, Arambula, Bains, Bauer-Kahan, Bennett, Berman, Boerner, Bonta, Bryan, Calderon, Juan Carrillo, Wendy Carrillo, Cervantes, Connolly, Davies, Dixon, Essayli, Flora, Mike Fong, Vince Fong, Friedman, Gabriel, Gallagher, Garcia, Gipson, Grayson, Haney, Hart, Hoover, Irwin, Jackson, Jones-Sawyer, Kalra, Lackey, Lee, Low, Lowenthal, Maienschein, Mathis, McCarty, McKinnor, Muratsuchi, Stephanie Nguyen, Ortega, Pacheco, Papan, Jim Patterson, Joe Patterson, Pellerin, Petrie-Norris, Quirk-Silva, Ramos, Reyes, Luz Rivas, Robert Rivas, Rodriguez, Blanca Rubio, Sanchez, Santiago, Schiavo, Soria, Ta, Ting, Valencia, Villapudua, Waldron, Wallis, Ward, Weber, Wicks, Wilson, Wood, Zbur, Rendon

ABS, ABST OR NV: Chen, Megan Dahle, Holden

SENATE FLOOR: 39-0-1

YES: Allen, Alvarado-Gil, Archuleta, Ashby, Atkins, Becker, Blakespear, Bradford, Caballero, Cortese, Dahle, Dodd, Durazo, Eggman, Glazer, Gonzalez, Grove, Hurtado, Jones, Laird, Limón, McGuire, Menjivar, Min, Newman, Nguyen, Niello, Ochoa Bogh, Portantino, Roth, Rubio, Seyarto, Skinner, Smallwood-Cuevas, Stern, Umberg, Wahab, Wiener, Wilk

ABS, ABST OR NV: Padilla

SENATE FLOOR: 39-0-1

YES: Allen, Alvarado-Gil, Archuleta, Ashby, Atkins, Becker, Blakespear, Bradford, Caballero, Cortese, Dahle, Dodd, Durazo, Glazer, Gonzalez, Grove, Hurtado, Jones, Laird, Limón, McGuire, Menjivar, Min, Newman, Nguyen, Niello, Ochoa Bogh, Padilla, Portantino, Roth, Rubio, Seyarto, Skinner, Smallwood-Cuevas, Stern, Umberg, Wahab, Wiener, Wilk

ABS, ABST OR NV: Eggman

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