
SENATE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Senator Anthony Portantino, Chair
2023 - 2024 Regular Session

SB 606 (Alvarado-Gil) - State highways: State Route 203: reduction

Version: April 10, 2023

Urgency: No

Hearing Date: April 24, 2023

Policy Vote: TRANS. 16 - 0

Mandate: No

Consultant: Mark McKenzie

Bill Summary: SB 606 would authorize the California Transportation Commission (CTC) to relinquish to the Town of Mammoth Lakes all or a portion of State Route (SR) 203 within its jurisdiction, as specified.

Fiscal Impact:

- Unknown one-time Department of Transportation (Caltrans) costs ranging from minor to potentially up to the low millions of dollars prior to the relinquishment of the designated segment of SR 203 to the town of Mammoth Lakes (State Highway Account). These costs would be offset in future years due to avoided maintenance costs on the relinquished segment.

Background: Existing law identifies the California state highway system (SHS) through a description of segments of the state's regional and interregional roads that are owned and operated by Caltrans. Existing law requires the CTC to relinquish to cities and counties segments of state highways that have been deleted from the SHS by legislative enactment. The CTC is prohibited from relinquishing a segment of state highway to a city or county that has been superseded by relocation until Caltrans has placed the highway into a "state of good repair," which includes litter removal, weed control, and tree and shrub trimming, but does not obligate Caltrans to perform widening, new construction, or major reconstruction, unless directed by the CTC.

The Legislature has provided statutory authorization to CTC to relinquish a number of state highway segments to local jurisdictions under specified conditions.

Relinquishment provides the recipient agency with greater control over local transportation projects and relieves Caltrans of any further responsibility to improve, maintain, or repair infrastructure, and also from exposure to tort liability related to the relinquished segment of state highway. Generally, relinquishments are subject to negotiated agreements between Caltrans and a local jurisdiction seeking control of a local highway segment. The CTC must determine that the agreement for relinquishment, which has typically involved a one-time payment of State Highway Account funds to the local entity, is in the best interests of the state.

SR 203 is an 8.67 mile spur route with an eastern terminus at U.S. Route 395 in Mono County and a western terminus near Minaret Summit (the roadway continues past this point, but it is not part of the state highway system). Nearly 7 miles of SR 203 is within the Town of Mammoth Lakes, where it is known as both "Main Street" and "Minaret Road." Minaret Summit receives significant snowfall in the winter and the highway is usually closed during the winter west of the Mammoth Mountain Ski Area (MMSA) to the Summit.

Proposed Law: AB 606 would authorize the CTC to relinquish to the Town of Mammoth Lakes the portion of SR 203 within its jurisdiction, upon a determination that the terms and conditions of the relinquishment are found to be in the state's best interests. The relinquished portions would cease to be a part of the state highway system, and would be ineligible for future adoption as a state highway. The Town of Mammoth Lakes must ensure the continuity of traffic flow, including any traffic signal progression, on the relinquished portion and maintain signs directing motorists to the continuation of SR 203.

Staff Comments: Caltrans may provide State Highway Account funding to a local entity that is assuming control over state highway segments in order to bring the roadway up to a "state of good repair," although there is no statutory obligation to do so. The actual amounts vary for each relinquished highway segment and are determined by a negotiation of terms and conditions between Caltrans and the local jurisdiction. Those costs are based upon a cost-benefit analysis covering a ten-year period, which is included in a Project Scope Summary Report prepared for legislative relinquishments.

There is no relinquishment assessment report available at this time for the portions of SR 203 that are within the jurisdiction of Mammoth Lakes, and Caltrans has not identified a specific cost estimate for the relinquishment of this highway segment. Based on other relinquishments, however, one-time costs may range from minimal to up to \$1 million per centerline mile of roadway, depending on numerous factors such as roadway condition, projected maintenance costs, and any planned capital projects. This bill would authorize the relinquishment of approximately 7 miles of SR 203 within Mammoth Lakes' municipal jurisdiction. Staff notes, however, that the portion of the highway under consideration for development will likely require relinquishment of less than 1.5 miles of SR 203 (see below).

Actual costs and savings associated with this bill would be more certain if legislation to authorize relinquishment followed, rather than preceded, the completion of the cost-benefit analyses and agreements between Caltrans and the Town of Mammoth Lakes. However, Caltrans does not typically conduct the analysis and enter into negotiations until legislative authority for relinquishment has been provided.

This bill would give the Town of Mammoth Lakes control over a portion of SR 203 to facilitate a development project at the MMSA, a 20-acre recreational area. As part of this proposed project, MMSA plans to realign a portion of SR 203 (Minaret Road) to the north, on the southern edge of the lodge, which would give visitors access to both sides of the lodge (see proposed plan in the Senate Transportation Committee's analysis). This plan also includes building a new transit hub at the base of the lodge to make it more accessible to public transit and improve traffic circulation in the community. Completion of the MMSA development project as planned would require an addition to, and diversion of, the existing route, requiring relinquishment.

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