

CONCURRENCE IN SENATE AMENDMENTS

AB 1608 (Wilson)

As Amended August 5, 2026

Majority vote

SUMMARY

Authorizes the Office of the Inspector General (OIG), High-Speed Rail to use position classifications that other state agencies performing oversight work use and for any contract signed by the IG up to \$1 million in value, exempts it from certain contracting requirements.

Senate Amendments

Remove provisions regarding sharing confidential information, sharing and destroying workpapers, making records public under the Public Record Act, and publishing completed reports because these or similar provisions were included in SB 169 (Committee on Budget and Fiscal Review), Chapter 82, Statutes of 2026.

COMMENTS

Chapter 796 of 1996 (SB 1420, Kopp) established HSRA to plan and construct a high-speed rail system that would link the state's major population centers. In November 2008, voters approved Proposition 1A, which authorized the state to sell \$10 billion in general obligation bonds to partially fund the system and related projects. Proposition 1A also specified certain criteria and conditions that the system must ultimately achieve. For example, the measure requires that the system be designed to be capable of specified travel times along certain routes, such as nonstop travel from San Francisco to Los Angeles within two hours and forty minutes. The measure also specifies that passenger rail service operated by HSRA, or pursuant to its authority, will not require an operating subsidy.

The Legislature passed SB 198 (Committee on Budget and Fiscal Review), Chapter 71, Statutes of 2022 which in addition to other things, established an Office of the Inspector General (OIG-HSR) to conduct timely, independent oversight of the project and make recommendations to strengthen the planning, delivery, and operation of the project. The OIG-HSR is an independent office that is not a subdivision of any other governmental entity, including the HSRA.

The first IG was appointed in September 2023. Since that time, the office has completed four reviews of reports HSRA is statutorily required to produce and four operational reviews of the project. Consistent with state law, the OIG-HSR maintains a list of its findings and the status of the HSRA's efforts to address them and publishes the list on the office's website.

The OIG-HSR faces numerous challenges in part because it is new, small, and some of the issues it is encountering were not considered at the time the office was created. The OIG-HSR has been slowed in its ability to identify problems with the high-speed rail project and recommend solutions by the following factors:

Staff vacancies. The OIG-HSR does not have access to job classifications that match the skill set required of its staff. Thus, despite its recruitment efforts over the last two years, only four of eight staff positions are filled. OIG-HSR reviews and investigations have been delayed and will continue to be delayed by a lack of staff.

Lack of purchasing authority. Over many years of organizational development, state departments obtain delegations to execute contracts and procure IT goods and services. However, until then, many smaller state departments use the administrative services of their overseeing agency. Under state law, the OIG-HSR is an independent office and not a component part of any other agency. Thus, its procurements are processed by the Department of General Services or the California Technology Department, leading to significant delays and increased costs in acquiring the goods and services needed to fulfill its mission, including establishing a secure whistleblower hotline. This can result in delays in acquiring expertise needed to complete time-sensitive evaluations of the project and create excessive cost and administrative burdens on the OIG-HSR.

According to the Author

The Office of the Inspector General for High-Speed Rail serves as the public's eyes and ears on one of California's most consequential infrastructure projects. Californians depend on the OIG to surface contracting failures, project delays, and cost overruns. This bill strengthens that oversight by ensuring the office can hire the qualified staff it needs and by requiring its reports to be made public.

Arguments in Support

According to the Association of Inspector Generals, "AB 1608 enhances the operational independence of the OIG-HSR by providing greater flexibility in personnel administration and contracting authority, and reducing unnecessary administrative constraints. AIG's Green Book recognizes an OIG must possess sufficient autonomy and resources to recruit, retain, and deploy qualified professionals necessary to fulfill its oversight mission."

Arguments in Opposition

None on file.

FISCAL COMMENTS

Pursuant to Senate Rule 28.8, negligible state costs.

VOTES:

ASM TRANSPORTATION: 12-4-0

YES: Wilson, Aguiar-Curry, Ahrens, Carrillo, Harabedian, Hart, Jackson, Papan, Ransom, Rogers, Sharp-Collins, Ward

NO: Davies, Hoover, Lackey, Macedo

ASM JUDICIARY: 9-3-0

YES: Kalra, Lee, Bryan, Connolly, Harabedian, Pacheco, Papan, Stefani, Zbur

NO: Macedo, Dixon, Sanchez

ASM APPROPRIATIONS: 9-4-2

YES: Wicks, Arambula, Caloza, Fong, Mark González, Krell, Pacheco, Pellerin, Solache

NO: Hoover, Dixon, Ta, Tangipa

ABS, ABST OR NV: Calderon, Muratsuchi

ASSEMBLY FLOOR: 52-20-8

YES: Addis, Aguiar-Curry, Ahrens, Alvarez, Ávila Farías, Berman, Boerner, Bonta, Bryan, Calderon, Carrillo, Connolly, Elhawary, Fong, Gabriel, Garcia, Gipson, Mark González, Haney, Harabedian, Hart, Irwin, Jackson, Kalra, Krell, Lee, Lowenthal, McKinnor, Nguyen, Ortega, Pacheco, Papan, Pellerin, Petrie-Norris, Quirk-Silva, Ramos, Ransom, Celeste Rodriguez, Michelle Rodriguez, Rogers, Blanca Rubio, Schultz, Sharp-Collins, Solache, Soria, Stefani, Valencia, Ward, Wicks, Wilson, Zbur, Rivas

NO: Alanis, Bains, Castillo, Davies, DeMaio, Dixon, Ellis, Flora, Gallagher, Jeff Gonzalez, Hadwick, Hoover, Johnson, Lackey, Macedo, Patterson, Sanchez, Ta, Tangipa, Wallis

ABS, ABST OR NV: Arambula, Bauer-Kahan, Bennett, Caloza, Chen, Muratsuchi, Patel, Schiavo

UPDATED

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