

ASSEMBLY THIRD READING
AB 1756 (Jeff Gonzalez)
As Amended March 9, 2026
Majority vote

SUMMARY

Extends the sunset of an existing off-highway motor vehicle (OHV) "combined use" highway pilot project in the City of Needles by five years.

Major Provisions

- 1) Extends by five years to January 1, 2033, an OHV "combined use" highway pilot project in the City of Needles (City) for purposes of linking existing OHV trails on federal lands and connecting OHV recreational areas with service and lodging facilities in order to create a unified system of OHV trails, preserve traffic safety, improve natural resource protection, reduce off-highway vehicle trespass on private land, and minimize impacts on city residents.
- 2) Extends the deadline, by five years to January 1, 2032, of two reports due to the Legislature on the safety and effectiveness of the pilot and any impacts to natural or cultural resources.
- 3) Provides that any "combined use" highways appropriately designated by the City under the pilot first created by AB 2152 (Smith), Chapter 185, Statutes of 2022 remain valid and effective for the extended duration of the pilot pursuant to this bill.

COMMENTS

Extension of the City of Needles pilot. The City of Needles is located in San Bernardino County and the Mojave Desert region of Southern California. It is mostly surrounded by federal lands, much of which is used for outdoor recreation, including OHV recreation, including those under the jurisdiction of the Bureau of Land Management and the Bureau of Reclamation.

Following precedent set by similar OHV pilots the Legislature approved for Inyo County and Red Rock Canyon State Park, the Legislature authorized the City of Needles to create a five-year "combined use" highway pilot in 2022. For the next three years, the City undertook extensive planning and compliance activities, including engineering and traffic safety analysis, coordinated with federal and state entities, and held public workshops.

The City Council adopted its "OHV Master Plan", codifying the pilot, on September 9, 2025, with the concurrence of the California Highway Patrol (CHP), and a related signage plan on January 13, 2026. The Master Plan consists of 12 "combined-use" roadways, most of which are less than one mile, originating from locations within the City and connecting to BLM lands. It is in the process of procuring and installing signage and anticipates opening the "combined-use" highways to the public in 2026.

Assuming this timeframe and without the extension provided by this bill, the public will have less than two years to access these highways. Accordingly, it is reasonable to extend the current sunset through 2033 not only for public use but so the City can collect sufficient data to fulfill the statutory requirement of evaluating the pilot's safety, environmental outcomes, enforcement impacts, and rural economic benefits.

According to the Author

"AB 1756 is necessary to extend the City of Needles' Off-Highway Motor Vehicle Pilot Program to January 1, 2033, to allow meaningful evaluation of its safety, environmental, and economic outcomes. The Legislature has recognized Needles as a remote, rural, and disadvantaged community of approximately 5,200 residents, geographically isolated by over 140 miles of desert and surrounded by heavily used federal recreation lands. Tourism is a primary economic driver, and the pilot was designed to create a unified, regulated system linking federal trails to lodging, fuel, and local businesses, supporting the local economy while reducing trespass and unmanaged access.

Although authorized in 2022 under Vehicle Code Section 38026.2, the majority of the pilot period was consumed by engineering analysis, public outreach, and CHP safety concurrence. With the 9.20-mile Master Plan adopted in 2025, the program is only now entering implementation. This bill does not expand authority—it provides sufficient time to measure rural economic impact and safety performance."

Arguments in Support

Writing in support, the San Bernadino Sheriff's Department states: "The City of Needles has demonstrated a strong commitment to implementing this program responsibly. Through extensive planning, engineering analysis, public outreach, and coordination with the California Highway Patrol, the city has ensured that designated routes meet appropriate safety standards. However, much of the initial pilot period was necessarily devoted to these foundational efforts, leaving limited time to evaluate the program's long-term safety, environmental, and enforcement outcomes."

Arguments in Opposition

None on file.

FISCAL COMMENTS

According to the Assembly Appropriations Committee:

Minor, absorbable costs to the CHP, the Department of Transportation, the Department of Fish and Wildlife and the Department of Parks and Recreation to consult on reports that evaluate the pilot program.

Nonetheless, consistent with the committee's rules and practice, this bill is a candidate for the suspense file because it has the primary purpose of extending a pilot program.

VOTES**ASM TRANSPORTATION: 16-0-0**

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

ASM APPROPRIATIONS: 15-0-0

YES: Wicks, Hoover, Aguiar-Curry, Calderon, Caloza, Dixon, Fong, Mark González, Krell, Pacheco, Pellerin, Sharp-Collins, Solache, Ta, Tangipa

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