

- 6) Prior to the designation of a “combined use” highway, requires a local entity, the Director of Parks and Recreational or a federal agency to first notify the Commissioner of the California Highway Patrol (CHP) and prohibits a designation in which CHP determines would constitute a potential safety hazard.
- 7) Authorizes the above entities to promulgate necessary rules and regulations and install appropriate signage, as approved by the Department of Transportation (Caltrans). A “combined use” designation is only effective upon installation of such signage.
- 8) Permits a registered OHV with an appropriate license plate to be operated on a local or state two-lane highway but only to cross the highway; an OHV may cross a highway with more than two lanes but only a place designated by Caltrans or a local authority.
- 9) Prohibits an OHV from being operated on a combined-use highway under the following circumstances:
 - a) During the hours of darkness;
 - b) On a highway that does not have an operational stoplight;
 - c) Without rubber tires; and,
 - d) Without a valid driver’s license of the appropriate class and insurance.
- 10) Until January 1, 2028, authorizes the City of Needles to create a pilot project to designate “combined-use” highways on city roads, with the concurrence of CHP, for a total of no more than 10 miles per highway segment for purposes of linking existing OHV trails, trailheads, and services to Bureau of Land Management or United States Forest Service lands. Provides that the pilot is intended to provide a unified system of trails for OHVs, preserve traffic safety, improve natural resource protection, reduce off-highway vehicle trespass on private land, and minimize impacts on city residents.
- 11) Requires the City of Needles to submit two reports to the Legislature by January 1, 2027:
 - a) The first report, to be prepared in consultation with CHP, Caltrans, and DPR, requires an evaluation of the safety and effectiveness of the pilot,

including its impact on traffic flows, safety, and OHV usage on existing trails; and,

- b) The second report, to be prepared in consultation with Department of Fish and Wildlife and the Mojave Desert Air Quality Management District, requires an evaluation of any impacts on cultural resources and archaeological sites, streambed modifications and water quality impacts, impacts on wildlife and aquatic habitat, native plants, traffic, particulate pollution, and noise.
- 12) Authorizes DPR to conduct, until January 1, 2030, an OHV “combined-used” pilot project at Red Rock Canyon State Park for no more than 10 miles per highway segment subject to the same or similar conditions as the City of Needles pilot project.

This bill:

- 1) Extends by five years to January 1, 2033, an OHV “combined use” highway pilot project in the City of Needles 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 by five years to January 1, 2032, 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:

- 1) *Purpose of the bill.* According to the author, "AB 1756 is necessary to extend the City of Needles' Off-Highway Motor Vehicle (OHV) 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 §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.”

- 2) *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 (BLM) 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 its five-year 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 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 City limits and connecting to BLM lands. It is currently procuring signage; after installation and a public workshop, it anticipates announcing the official opening of the “combined-use” highways later in 2026.

Assuming this timeframe and without the extension provided by this bill, the public will have less than two years to access “combined-use” highways. Accordingly, it is reasonable to extend the current sunset through 2033 not only to allow 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.

- 3) *Double referral.* This bill has been double referred to the Senate Natural Resources and Water Committee.

RELATED/PREVIOUS LEGISLATION:

SB 632 (Caballero, Chapter 592, Statutes of 2024) – Authorized DPR to conduct a “combined-use” highway pilot at Red Rock Canyon State Park, located between the City of Bakersfield and the Mojave Desert. The pilot is on-going but set to sunset in 2030 with a report due to the Legislature in 2029.

AB 2152 (Smith, Chapter 185, Statutes of 2022) – Authorized the City of Needles, through January 1, 2028, to establish a pilot project to designate combined-use highways in the City to link existing OHV trails and to connect OHV recreational use areas with necessary services and lodging facilities.

SB 402 (Borgeas, Chapter 211, Statutes of 2019) – Extended the sunset of the Inyo County OHV combined use pilot by five years to January 2025.

SB 1345 (Berryhill, Chapter 217, Statutes of 2016) – Extended the sunset of the Inyo County OHV combined use pilot by three years to January 1, 2020.

AB 628 (Conway, Chapter 532, Statutes of 2011) – Authorized Inyo County to establish the first OHV “combined-use” highway pilot program.

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

POSITIONS: (Communicated to the committee before noon on Wednesday, June 17, 2026.)

SUPPORT:

City of Needles
San Bernardino County
San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department
Sci California Coalition

OPPOSITION:

None received

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