

Date of Hearing: April 22, 2026

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Juan Carrillo, Chair

AB 1976 (Wicks) – As Amended April 9, 2026

SUBJECT: Streets and highways: pedestrian and bicycle facilities.

SUMMARY: Establishes the Pedestrian Mall Law of 2026 (2026 PML). Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Repeals and recasts the Pedestrian Mall Law of 1960 (1960 PML) as the 2026 PML.
- 2) Defines the following terms:
 - a) “City” to include every county, city, and city and county within this state. “The city” means the particular county, city, or city and county, acting pursuant to the PML.
 - b) “City street,” as used with regard to streets located within a city or city and county, to mean a street located within the city or city and county, except a “freeway,” “state highway,” or “county highway”, as defined. “City street,” as used with regard to streets located within a county, to mean a street located within the county, except a “freeway” or “state highway,” as defined.
 - c) “Improvements” to include, but are not limited to, paving, sidewalks, curbs, gutters, sewers, drainage works, street lighting facilities, fire protection facilities, flood protection facilities, water distribution facilities, retaining walls, landscaping, tree planting, statuary, fountains, decorative structures, benches, restrooms, childcare facilities, display facilities, information booths, public assembly facilities, improvements necessary or convenient for a covered air-conditioned mall, and other structures, works, or improvements necessary or convenient to serve members of the public using the applicable pedestrian mall, including the reconstruction or relocation of existing city-owned works and improvements or facilities on the city streets. “Improvement” does not include vehicular parking facilities.
 - d) “Legislative body” to mean the legislative body of the city.
 - e) “Pedestrian mall” to mean one or more “city streets,” or portions thereof, on which vehicular traffic is or is to be restricted in whole or in part and which is or is to be used exclusively or primarily for pedestrian travel.
 - f) “Street” to mean any public street, road, highway, alley, lane, court, way, or place of any nature open to the use of the public.
- 3) Authorizes a legislative body to do all of the following:
 - a) Establish pedestrian malls.
 - b) Prohibit, in whole or in part, vehicular traffic on a pedestrian mall.

- c) Construct on city streets that have been or will be established as a pedestrian mall improvements of any kind or nature necessary or convenient to the operation of the city streets as a pedestrian mall.
 - d) Pay, from general funds of the city or any other available moneys, the whole or any portion of the cost of improvements constructed pursuant to c), above.
 - e) To do any and all other acts necessary or convenient for the accomplishment of the purposes of the PML.
- 4) Authorizes a legislative body to acquire, by gift, purchase, eminent domain, or otherwise, land, real property, or rights-of-way that will become part of a city street established as a pedestrian mall or that will otherwise be used by the city as a part of, or for purposes connected with, a pedestrian mall.
 - 5) Specifies that land, real property, or rights-of-way acquired pursuant to 4), above, may be improved in the same manner as city streets may be improved pursuant to c) of 3), above.
 - 6) Provides that a legislative body may make improvements on city streets adjacent to the pedestrian mall where those improvements are necessary or convenient to the operation of the mall.
 - 7) Specifies that the powers granted pursuant to the PML to prohibit, in whole or in part, vehicular traffic on a city street shall be in addition to, and not limited by, the powers granted by any other law.
 - 8) Provides that the PML shall be liberally construed to the end that its purpose may be effective.
 - 9) Specifies that the PML does not affect any other law relating to the same or similar subject, but provides an alternative procedure for the subject to which it relates. When proceedings are taken under this part, its provisions only shall apply. The Special Assessment Investigation, Limitation and Majority Protest Act of 1931 shall not apply to any proceedings taken under any other law for the improvement of a pedestrian mall.
 - 10) Authorizes a legislative body to adopt, following a public hearing, a resolution or ordinance to establish a pedestrian mall if it determines that the public interest and convenience requires the establishment of the pedestrian mall. The resolution or ordinance shall contain the following:
 - a) The following findings:
 - i) A determination that the closure or traffic restriction leaves a sufficient portion of the streets in the surrounding area for other public uses, including vehicular, pedestrian, and bicycle traffic.
 - ii) A determination that the closure will create a public benefit to local commerce, civic gatherings, cultural activities, public safety, or otherwise serve the public interest and convenience.

- b) A general description of the pedestrian mall, including the city street, or portions of city streets, that are to be established as a pedestrian mall.
 - c) Rules and regulations prohibiting vehicular traffic, in whole or in part on the pedestrian mall. If vehicular traffic is proposed to be prohibited only in part, the resolution or ordinance shall also contain a general statement of the exceptions proposed to be made. The resolution or ordinance may include any of the following exceptions:
 - i) Exceptions in favor of public, emergency, utility, and other classes of vehicle.
 - ii) Exceptions in favor of all or certain classes of vehicle during certain days or during portions of days.
 - iii) Exceptions of any other kind or nature.
 - d) Any additional rules and regulations pertaining to the interpretation, operation, and enforcement of the rules and regulations described in c), above, and otherwise pertaining to the use, operation, maintenance, and control of the pedestrian mall.
- 11) Provides that the city shall provide notice of the public hearing in accordance with existing Planning and Zoning Law.
- 12) Authorizes a city to initiate the process to establish a pedestrian mall or to initiate the process following an application by a business, educational institution, or other entity.
- 13) Provides that receipt of an application pursuant to 12), above, shall not obligate a city to initiate the process to establish a pedestrian mall.
- 14) Specifies that if, in connection with the initial establishment of a pedestrian mall, a legislative body proposes to make any improvements, the resolution or ordinance described in 10), above, shall also contain the following:
- a) A general description of the improvements proposed to be made. The description may be made in any manner permitted or provided in any law under which the improvements are to be made or financed.
 - b) A general statement of the source or sources of money proposed to be used to pay the costs and expenses of the improvements.
 - c) If all or any part of the improvements are proposed to be made or financed under the Improvement Act of 1911, the Municipal Improvement Act of 1913, or similar special assessment law, a statement as to what law is proposed to be used.
- 15) Authorizes a legislative body to allow private businesses use of the pedestrian mall, and may allow those private businesses to make improvements to the pedestrian mall.
- 16) Requires a legislative body to install and maintain signage that clearly designates the boundaries of the pedestrian mall and related improvements and that clearly state the applicable restriction on the use of vehicles within the pedestrian mall.

- 17) Specifies that, before the adoption of the resolution or ordinance pursuant to 10), above, a legislative body may allow a pilot or phased pedestrian mall project pursuant to any other law that permits temporary street closures.
- 18) Provides that a legislative body may only expand, reduce, or rescind a pedestrian mall by adopting a resolution or ordinance, after a public meeting, on the matter.
- 19) Specifies that the act of rescinding a pedestrian mall does not require a city to return the street to its prior condition.
- 20) Provides that the establishment of a pedestrian mall is consistent with the public access requirements of the California Coastal Act of 1976.
- 21) Provides that a board of supervisors shall not hold a community input meeting to gather input from the general public on a proposed pedestrian or bicycle safety project for a county highway after the project is included in an approved plan that will be implemented as part of the circulation element of the county's general plan.
- 22) Specifies that, at a public meeting where a contract is awarded for, or when county staff are directed to begin, the construction of a pedestrian or bicycle safety project for a county highway, or anytime thereafter, the board of supervisors shall not terminate the project unless the board of supervisors makes both of the following findings at a public meeting:
 - a) The preponderance of the evidence shows that the public benefit of not delivering the project outweighs the safety benefit to the community.
 - b) The preponderance of the evidence shows that the cost of the safety project cannot be funded given the budget of the county or the budget for the project.
- 23) Provides that, if a board of supervisors establishes a process for residents of the county to submit a petition to request the installation of a traffic calming measure on a county highway, the board of supervisors shall not require the petition to contain the signatures of more than a simple majority of the total number of persons whose residences are located, in whole or in part, within 1,000 feet of the proposed traffic calming measure, as measured along the centerline of a highway or combination of highways.
- 24) Specifies that the legislative body of a city shall not hold a community input meeting to gather input from the general public on a proposed pedestrian or bicycle safety project for a street or highway after the project is included in an approved plan that will be implemented as part of the circulation element of the city's general plan.
- 25) Provides that, at a public meeting where a contract is awarded for, or when city staff are directed to begin, the construction of a pedestrian or bicycle safety project for a street or highway, or anytime thereafter, the legislative body of a city shall not terminate the project unless the legislative body makes both of the following findings at a public meeting:
 - a) The preponderance of the evidence shows that the public benefit of not delivering the project outweighs the safety benefit to the community.

- b) The preponderance of the evidence shows that the cost of the safety project cannot be funded given the budget of the city or the budget for the project.
- 26) Specifies that, if the legislative body of a city establishes a process for residents of the city to submit a petition to request the installation of a traffic calming measure on a street or highway, the legislative body shall not require the petition to contain the signatures of more than a majority of the total number of persons whose residences are located, in whole or in part, within 1,000 feet of the proposed traffic calming measure, as measured along the centerline of a street or highway or combination of streets and highways.
- 27) Finds and declares that certain provisions of this bill address a matter of statewide concern rather than a municipal affair. Therefor these provisions apply to all cities, including charter cities.
- 28) Provides that no reimbursement is required by this bill because a local agency or school district has the authority to levy service charges, fees, or assessments sufficient to pay for the program or level of service mandated by this bill. However, if the Commission on State Mandates determines that this act contains other costs mandated by the state, reimbursement to local agencies and school districts for those costs shall be made.
- 29) Removes reference to the 1960 PML from the Government Claims Act.
- 30) Exempts from the requirements of California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) the establishment or expansion of a pedestrian mall
- 31) Contains additional findings and declarations to support its purposes.

EXISTING LAW:

Establishes the 1960 PML (Streets and Highways Code § 11000 et. Seq.)

FISCAL EFFECT: This bill is keyed fiscal and contains a state-mandated local program.

COMMENTS:

For a thorough discussion of sections 5-10 in this bill, see the Assembly Transportation Committee's analysis.

- 1) **Bill Summary.** This bill repeals the 1960 PML and establishes the 2026 PML to authorize a legislative body to establish pedestrian malls, prohibit, in whole or in part, vehicular traffic on a pedestrian mall, construct improvements on pedestrian malls, and pay the cost of any improvements. This bill allows a legislative body to adopt, following a public hearing, a resolution or ordinance to establish a pedestrian mall which must contain specified information. Additionally, this bill authorizes a legislative body to allow private businesses to make improvements to the pedestrian mall and requires the legislative body to install signage that clearly designates the boundaries of the pedestrian mall.

This bill prohibits a city or county from holding a community input meeting to gather input on a proposed pedestrian or bicycle safety project after the project is included in an approved plan that is part of the city's or county's circulation element. This bill also prohibits a city or

county from terminating a pedestrian or bicycle safety project, where a contract has been awarded, unless the city or county makes certain findings. Additionally, this bill would make changes to the petition process, if the city or county establishes such a process, for proposed traffic calming measures.

Lastly, this bill removes a reference to the 1960 PML from Government Claims Act. Streets for All is the sponsor of this bill.

- 2) **Author's Statement.** According to the author, "While many of California's transportation laws are well-intentioned, there are a number of laws and regulations that have become overly burdensome and unnecessarily delay much-needed safety measures and improvements in transportation and pedestrian-related projects. Safety and pedestrian-related transportation projects have run into outdated regulations that discourage action, raise costs, and lead to delays. AB 1976 would update existing laws and regulations that delay projects in order to provide more streamlined processes for projects that provide additional safety measures for local communities and align with the state's climate and equity goals."
- 3) **Assessment Districts and Proposition 218.** Post-Proposition 13, assessments gained momentum as a new source of funding. Most assessments are levied against real property, and are generally collected on the property tax roll, secured by a lien against the assessed property, and subject to Proposition 218. Proposition 218 (Article XIII D of the California Constitution) distinguishes among taxes, assessments, and fees for property-related revenues, and requires certain actions before such revenues may be collected.

Proposition 218 includes requirements to determine which properties are included in a benefit assessment district and the apportionment of each assessment. Local agencies must determine the special benefit for each identified parcel and separate the general benefits because only special benefits are assessable. The cost of the assessment cannot exceed the reasonable cost of the proportional special benefit that parcel receives.

Property-based assessment districts' notice, protest, and hearing requirements for new, extended, or increase assessments are governed by Proposition 218, which involves mailed protest ballots to all assessed property owners, a 45-day protest period, and a public hearing at which protests are counted and the presence or absence of a majority protest is determined. After complying with notice, protest, and hearing requirements, if a majority protest is not received from property owners, the legislative body may adopt a resolution to establish the assessment district and levy the assessment.

Proposition 218 requires a professional engineer's report to estimate the amount of special benefit to landowners and the amount of general benefit. The Constitution defines a "special benefit" as a particular and distinct benefit over and above general benefits conferred on real property located in the district or to the public at large. General enhancement of property value does not constitute "special benefit."

- 4) **Circulation Element.** The circulation element identifies the general location and extent of existing and proposed major thoroughfares, transportation routes, terminals, and other local public utilities and facilities. Generally, this element contains detailed maps, standards for operation, policies, and financing plans. It serves as an infrastructure plan and must correlate with the land use element.

- 5) **Pedestrian Mall Law of 1960.** A number of cities have established pedestrian malls using the 1960 PML, including the cities of Stockton and Riverside as just two examples. The Legislature adopted the 1960 PML [AB X1 14 (Ernest R. Geddes), Chapter 33, Statutes of 1960] in recognition that in certain areas in cities, and particularly in retail shopping areas, there is a need to separate pedestrian travel from vehicular travel, and that the separation is necessary to protect the public safety or otherwise to serve the public interest and convenience. The 1960 PML allows a city or county to establish a pedestrian mall, to prohibit vehicular traffic on a pedestrian mall, and to pay, from its general funds or from the proceeds of assessments, for damages resulting from the establishment of a pedestrian mall to property owners and the subsequent public improvements.

The city or county must adopt a resolution declaring its intent to establish a pedestrian mall. The resolution must contain: (a) the determination and declaration to establish a pedestrian mall, (b) a general description of the street, (c) a general description of the mall intersections, (d) a general description of the intersecting streets, (e) a statement that it proposes to adopt an ordinance prohibiting, in whole or in part, vehicular traffic on the pedestrian mall, (f) a general statement of the source(s) of moneys proposed to be used to pay damages, if any, allowed or awarded to a property owner complainant, (g) the day, hour, and place for a hearing on the pedestrian mall to hear protests and objections to the mall, and a statement that anyone may file a written protest with the city or county clerk before the end of said hearing, and (h) a statement that any owner of property or person with an interest in property who might suffer legal damage by reason of the establishment of the mall may file a written claim of damages with the city or county clerk before the end of said hearing, and the failure to file such a claim within the time provided shall be a waiver of any claim for damages.

No less than 90 days prior to the public hearing, copies of the resolution of intention are required to be posted on all streets proposed to be established as a pedestrian mall and all intersecting streets, as applicable, and a copy of the resolution must be recorded with the county recorder. No less than 45 days prior to the public hearing, a copy of the resolution must be mailed to any owner of property or person with an interest in property that abuts any portion of the mall or intersecting street.

At a public hearing noticed for the time specified in the resolution of intention and held to establish the proposed pedestrian mall, all objections, protests, and claims must be heard and considered. If the owners of property abutting the proposed pedestrian mall, representing a majority of the frontage on the proposed pedestrian mall, submit written objections to the establishment of the proposed pedestrian mall, the city or county must terminate the proceedings and no proceeding for the establishment of a pedestrian mall may be commenced within one year after such termination. Following the public hearing, the city or county must, by resolution, either abandon the proceeding or determine that a pedestrian mall shall be established.

Following the adoption of the resolution determining that a pedestrian mall should be established and upon payment of any claims, the city or county must adopt an ordinance establishing the pedestrian mall.

- 6) **1960 PML Claims Process.** The 1960 PML authorizes any person owning, or having any legal or equitable interest in, any real property that might suffer legal damage because of the establishment of a pedestrian mall to file with the clerk of the legislative body a written claim

of damages. At the hearing on the resolution of intention, the legislative body may allow any claim for damages. Any such allowance must be for the full amount of damages claimed.

If following the hearing that establishes the pedestrian mall there are any written claims for damages which have not been settled, the legislative body is required to direct that an action be brought in the superior court for a determination for damages, if any. The court action must be in the nature of a proceeding in eminent domain for the condemnation of the right in real property. Only after all claims have been settled, the legislative body may adopt an ordinance establishing the pedestrian mall. 1960 PML expressly permits a city or county to pay for any claims for damages from: a) general funds, b) other available moneys, or c) the proceeds of assessments levied on lands benefited by the establishment of a pedestrian mall.

- 7) **Government Claims Act.** Unlike traditional civil actions, in which a plaintiff directly files suit against an alleged defendant, claims against government entities are subject to unique timelines and processes. These processes are enumerated in the Government Claims Act. (Government Code Section 810 *et seq.*) Most claims against government entities must be presented to the government entity within one year of the claim's accrual. However, since the 1950s, claims related to death or for injury to person or to personal property or growing crops must be presented within six months of accrual. A critical aspect of the Government Claims Act, when compared to traditional tort claims, is the claims against government entities must first be "presented" to the government. Only once the government rejects or ignores a claim for 45-days may a plaintiff file suit in court. The failure to "present" the claim to the government prior to filing suit will bar the ultimate ability for the plaintiff to pursue the claim in court.
- 8) **Policy Considerations.** The 1960 PML contains many provisions to ensure that the property owners that will be most affected by the establishment of a pedestrian mall are able to participate in the establishment process. First, not more than 45 days before the public hearing, a copy of the resolution must be mailed to any owner of property or person with an interest in property that abuts any portion of the mall or intersecting street. Second, if the owners of land that abut the proposed pedestrian mall representing a majority of the frontage on the proposed pedestrian mall have made written objection to the establishment of the proposed pedestrian mall, the legislative body must terminate the proceedings for such establishment. Third, any owner of any real property that might suffer legal damage by reason of the establishment of the proposed pedestrian mall may file with the clerk of the legislative body a written claim of damages. These claims for damages must be settled prior to the establishment of the pedestrian mall. This bill would repeal the provisions of the 1960 PML and recast it as the 2026 PML without the above protections for property owners.

Additionally, the 1960 PML allows a city or county to propose and adopt an assessment in conjunction with the establishment of the pedestrian mall in order to pay for any necessary improvements and any claims up front without going to court. A coalition of local government associations states that, "In addition to limiting public input, AB 1976 removes important fiscal and legal protections currently available under the Pedestrian Mall Law of 1960. Existing law authorizes local municipalities to levy and collect assessments to help cover the maintenance, operation, repair, or improvement of a pedestrian mall. AB 1976 eliminates that authority. This change would deprive local governments of an important funding tool and shift more of the cost of these projects onto general local revenues, even where specific properties or businesses may directly benefit from the improvement. At a time

when cities and counties face significant budgetary pressures, the Legislature should not remove flexible local financing mechanisms that can help support the long-term success and upkeep of these public facilities.”

Given the concerns raised by the local government associations, the Committee may wish to consider if the 1960 PML should remain as a tool for cities and counties to establish pedestrian malls.

- 9) **Committee Amendments.** In order to address the policy consideration above, the Committee may wish to amend this bill as follows:
- a) Remove the repeal of the provisions related to the 1960 PML.
 - b) Make other technical and conforming changes.
- 10) **Arguments in Support.** According to Streets for All, the sponsors of this bill, “AB 1976 is a comprehensive bill that advances safe, people-centered streets by modernizing outdated laws, streamlining project delivery, and removing unnecessary barriers to implementing pedestrian and bicycle improvements. The bill updates the Pedestrian Mall Law of 1960, streamlines the implementation of previously approved safety projects, improves access to traffic calming measures, and provides local governments with greater flexibility to manage slow streets.

“California communities are facing a persistent safety crisis on their streets, yet the delivery of proven solutions is often slowed or blocked by outdated statutes, duplicative processes, and unreasonable administrative hurdles. Projects that have already gone through extensive planning and public engagement can be delayed or canceled late in the process. Residents seeking basic traffic calming improvements are sometimes required to gather excessive levels of support, creating inequitable barriers to safer streets. In addition, current law limits the ability of cities to respond quickly to safety needs on slow streets, and the existing Pedestrian Mall Law reflects an outdated framework that does not match today’s goals for vibrant, people-first public spaces.

“AB 1976 addresses these challenges through several key reforms. The bill modernizes the Pedestrian Mall Law by replacing outdated procedures with a more practical framework that allows cities and counties to establish and improve pedestrian malls while supporting local businesses and public use. It also ensures that pedestrian and bicycle safety projects that are already included in adopted plans can move forward without being subjected to redundant public processes or late-stage cancellation without clear findings. The bill additionally aims to improve access to neighborhood traffic calming by prohibiting jurisdictions from requiring more than a simple majority of nearby residents to support a petition. Lastly, it allows cities to set lower speed limits on designated slow streets without conducting a full engineering and traffic survey, enabling faster and more responsive safety improvements.

“These reforms are closely aligned with Streets For All’s mission to create safer, more accessible, and more sustainable transportation systems. AB 1976 will help communities deliver critical safety projects more efficiently, expand opportunities for active transportation, and support the creation of public spaces that prioritize people over cars. By removing unnecessary barriers and updating outdated laws, this bill represents an important

step toward reducing traffic injuries and fatalities while improving quality of life across California.”

- 11) **Arguments in Opposition.** According to the California State Association of Counties, the League of California Cities and the Urban Counties of California, “While we support thoughtful investments that improve pedestrian and bicycle safety, AB 1976 raises serious concerns for local governments by restricting meaningful public input, expanding exemptions from environmental review, eroding local control, and eliminating important fiscal and legal protections currently available to cities under existing law.

“A central concern with AB 1976 is its clear effort to limit public participation in local transportation and street design decisions. The bill would prohibit cities or counties from holding a community input meeting on a proposed pedestrian or bicycle safety project once that project has been included in an approved plan to be implemented through the circulation element of the general plan. That restriction is deeply troubling. Inclusion of a concept in a planning document should not be treated as a substitute for meaningful, project-specific public engagement. Projects often evolve considerably between conceptual planning and actual implementation, and local residents, businesses, property owners, emergency service providers, and other stakeholders deserve the opportunity to comment on how a specific proposal will function on the ground. By cutting off public engagement at a late but still critical stage of decision-making, the bill reduces transparency, weakens public trust, and limits a city’s ability to respond to legitimate neighborhood concerns.

“...AB 1976 also unduly limits the authority of city councils and county board of supervisors to reassess projects after implementation begins. Under the bill, once a project has reached the point of contract award or direction to begin construction, cities and counties may not terminate the project unless it makes specified findings under a preponderance-of-the-evidence standard. That is an inflexible and unnecessary constraint on local legislative discretion. Local governments must retain the ability to pause, revise, or terminate projects when conditions change, costs escalate, community impacts become clearer, or funding becomes unavailable. Local elected officials should not be placed in the position of having to satisfy a state-imposed evidentiary test simply to exercise sound judgment over local infrastructure investments.

“Finally, the bill’s declaration that these provisions address a matter of statewide concern and therefore apply to charter cities raises additional concerns about overreach into matters traditionally governed at the local level. Decisions regarding local streets, pedestrian access, neighborhood traffic patterns, public process, and the management of city rights-of-way are core municipal functions. AB 1976 would substitute a one-size-fits-all state mandate for the informed discretion of local governments that are closest to the communities affected.”

- 12) **Double-referral.** This bill is double-referred to the Transportation Committee, where it passed on a 12-4 vote on April 20, 2026.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

Streets for All [SPONSOR]
Sacramento Area Bicycle Advocates

San Diego County Bicycle Coalition
San Francisco Bay Area Planning & Urban Research Association (SPUR)
South Pas Active Streets
Sustainable Claremont
Transform
Western Electrical Contractors Association (if amended)

Opposition

California State Association of Counties
League of California Cities
Urban Counties of California
17 Individuals

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