

ASSEMBLY THIRD READING

AB 1976 (Wicks)

As Amended May 21, 2026

Majority vote

SUMMARY

Limits public input on "pedestrian and bicycle safety projects", restricts a local government from terminating a contract to construct such projects unless certain findings are made, and sets the threshold for any petition to request installation of a traffic calming measure to a majority of neighbors; establishes an alternative process, in addition to the Pedestrian Mall Act of 1960, for a local government to establish a pedestrian mall, *including on a state highway*; exempts the development of pedestrian malls from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and provides that a pedestrian mall is consistent with the California Coastal Act of 1976.

Major Provisions

- 1) *Unless required by law, prohibits a city or county, but not the legislative body of a city or county, from holding a community input meeting to reconsider, delay, or prevent implementation of a proposed pedestrian or bicycle safety project for a street or highway if the project is included in an approved plan that will be implemented as part of the circulation element of a general plan.*
- 2) *Unless required by law, prohibits a city or county from holding a community input meeting after the proposed pedestrian or bicycle safety project has passed 90% design, as determined by a city of county based on applicable engineering standards.*
- 3) *Notwithstanding the above, does not prohibit a city or county from holding a meeting on design features, aesthetics, and implementation details that do not materially alter the purpose of a pedestrian or bicycle safety project.*
- 4) Prohibits a legislative body of a city or county, at a public meeting where a contract is awarded for, or when staff are directed to begin, the construction of a pedestrian or bicycle safety project for a street or highway or anytime thereafter, from terminating the project unless the legislative body makes **one of** the following findings at a public meeting: a) the preponderance of the evidence *in the record* shows that the *specific, identifiable public benefits, including not limited to fiscal constraints, public health impacts, or conflicts with adopted plans*, of not delivering the project outweigh the safety benefit to the community; b) The preponderance of the evidence **in the record** shows that the cost of the safety project cannot be funded given the budget of the county or the budget for the project.
- 5) Prohibits a legislative body of a city or county, if the body establishes a process for residents to submit a petition to request the installation of a traffic calming measure on a street or highway, from requiring 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.
- 6) Exempts from CEQA the establishment or expansion of a pedestrian mall.

- 7) Establishes the Pedestrian Mall Law of 2026 as an alternative process, instead of the Pedestrian Mall Law of 1960, for a local government to establish a pedestrian mall, including:
- a) Authorizes a jurisdiction to establish a pedestrian mall, prohibit vehicular traffic on a pedestrian mall, make improvements to develop malls, and use general funds to finance the cost of improvements.
 - b) Requires a jurisdiction to follow notice, due process, public hearing, and signage requirements regarding the establishment of pedestrian malls.
 - c) 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.
 - d) 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 must contain specified information and findings.
 - e) 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.
 - f) 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.
 - g) 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.
 - h) Provides that the establishment of a pedestrian mall is consistent with the public access requirements of the California Coastal Act of 1976.
 - i) Finds and declares that certain provisions of this bill address a matter of statewide concern rather than a municipal affair. Therefore these provisions apply to all cities, including charter cities.
 - j) *Authorizes a city to establish a pedestrian mall on a state highway by resolution only if the highway functions as a main street, as defined, if approved or conditionally approved by the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans).*
 - k) *Authorizes Caltrans to approve, conditional approve or deny a city's application to establish a pedestrian mall and authorizes Caltrans to adopt guidelines governing an application process.*

COMMENTS

This analysis is limited to sections 3-8 of this bill. Refer to the Assembly Local Government Committee's analysis for the provisions pertaining to pedestrian malls.

This bill appears to be designed to streamline or expedite the development of pedestrian or bike safety projects in the face of potential community opposition or, in the case of traffic calming measures like speedbumps, challenges associated with securing 2/3 support from nearby residents before a locality will consider installing a speedbump or other calming measures.

Pedestrian and bike safety projects. Unless required by law, this bill prohibits a city or county from holding a "community input meeting" to reconsider, delay or prevent implementation of a proposed "pedestrian or bicycle safety project" if the project is included in an approved plan that will be implemented as part of the circulation element of a general plan. This bill also prohibits a city or county from holding such a meeting if a project has passed 90% design, as determined by applicable engineering standards. These prohibitions do not apply to a legislative body of a city or county. A "pedestrian or bicycle safety project" is defined as a project intended to improve safety, access, or mobility for pedestrians or bicyclists.

An internet search reveals many examples of local jurisdictions removing or considering removing bike lanes or portions of which in response to community concerns about parking or vehicular congestion impacts (e.g., Los Angeles, San Mateo and Berkeley). In the latter two examples, both cities previously approved bike lanes in planning documents (in 2020 and 2017, respectively) subject to public input.

In February 2025, the San Mateo City Council (City) voted to replace a recently developed bike lane, included in its 2020 Bike Master Plan (Master Plan), on Humboldt Street with 100 parking spots. As described in the Master Plan (which was incorporated into the City's circulation element): "This Plan is an update of the City's 2011 Bicycle Master Plan and serves as a blueprint for expanding and improving the San Mateo bicycle and mobility network in the coming years." It is a high-level document detailing the Master Plan's goals and objectives, existing bike conditions, proposed bike network, proposed implementation and funding. Other than listing the Humboldt Street project in a table of 69 other project priorities and graphically depicting its location on a map representing the city's Proposed Bicycle Network, the Master Plan provides no further project details.

This is not unusual for planning level documents. In fact, the Master Plan states: "As a next step, planning level concept designs will be developed for certain high, or medium-high, priority projects in areas where construction of the facility may be complicated due to limited available street right-of-way, complex lane or roadway geometries, the junction of multiple bikeway recommendations, and/or other factors. The community will be invited to provide input on the designs prior to implementation of each project through the standard project outreach effort. The conceptual engineering designs will provide detail for projects that will help the city be more competitive for grant funding and in developing partnerships to implement these projects."

Soliciting public input as described above is a routine and integral part of the development of public infrastructure. For conceptual plans like the Master Plan, this opportunity likely happens before a planning level body, which is probably the more appropriate body to consider rights-of-way, roadway geometries, and similar issues. This bill's prohibitions on holding a "community input meeting" do not apply to a city council or board of supervisors, which presumably may still deny or reconsider previous approval of a bicycle safety project. In fact, legislative bodies should appropriately be informed of or provide feedback on complex project design, implementation challenges, partnerships and other issues potentially not considered by a planning body and,

more importantly, should invite public input about them, particularly if they require difficult tradeoffs like the removal of parking or downsizing of a roadway to accommodate a bike lane.

51% for speedbumps. With respect to traffic calming measures, this bill prevents a legislative body from requiring more than a simple majority of nearby residents to sign a petition in support of such measures. The author cited several press articles or editorials critical of a two-thirds threshold requirement in the Cities of Los Angeles, Sacramento, and Oakland.

In other parts of the state a two-thirds voting threshold for the installation of traffic calming measures is not uncommon. In addition to the above cities, the City of Oxnard and San Joaquin County also impose this requirement, and Fresno and Bakersfield go even further by requiring 3/4 resident approval. But it is not clear to what extent this requirement is shared more broadly statewide and, more importantly, whether such thresholds are, in fact, frustrating the development of critical traffic calming measures to a degree that requires state intervention. Assuming they are, it is unclear if the presumed safety benefits of traffic calming measures outweigh any state interest in ensuring broad neighborhood support for such measures. These are some questions the Legislature may want to consider.

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".

Arguments in Support

Streets for All, sponsor of the bill states: "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."

Arguments in Opposition

The League of California Cities, California State Association of Counties, and the Urban Counties of California state: "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...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. 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."

FISCAL COMMENTS

According to the Assembly Appropriations Committee: No state costs. The bill makes authorizations and restrictions of local government but does not mandate any activity; therefore, the bill should not result in costs to local government that the state would then need to reimburse.

VOTES

ASM TRANSPORTATION: 12-4-0

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

NO: Davies, Hoover, Lackey, Macedo

ASM LOCAL GOVERNMENT: 8-2-0

YES: Carrillo, Pacheco, Ramos, Ransom, Blanca Rubio, Stefani, Ward, Wilson

NO: Ta, Johnson

ASM APPROPRIATIONS: 11-4-0

YES: Wicks, Bauer-Kahan, Calderon, Caloza, Fong, Mark González, Krell, Pacheco, Pellerin, Sharp-Collins, Solache

NO: Hoover, Ellis, Ta, Tangipa

UPDATED

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