

CONCURRENCE IN SENATE AMENDMENTS

AB 1976 (Wicks)

As Amended August 21, 2026

Majority vote

SUMMARY

Exempts the development of pedestrian malls from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and limits cities' and counties' ability to deny or delay pedestrian and bicycle safety improvements, among other provisions.

Senate Amendments

Clarify that limits on community input meetings do not limit public participation required by federal regulation or funding requirements.

COMMENTS

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 *or to public participation required by federal regulation or funding requirements*. A "pedestrian or bicycle safety project" is defined as a project intended to improve safety, access, or mobility for pedestrians or bicyclists.

Examples exist of local jurisdictions removing or considering removing bike lanes or portions of lanes 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, the Urban Counties of California, and the Rural County Representatives of California state: "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."

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

ASSEMBLY FLOOR: 49-19-12

YES: Aguiar-Curry, Ahrens, Alvarez, Ávila Farías, Bauer-Kahan, Bennett, Berman, Bonta, Bryan, Calderon, Caloza, Carrillo, Connolly, Elhawary, Fong, Garcia, Gipson, Mark González, Haney, Harabedian, Hart, Jackson, Kalra, Krell, Lee, Lowenthal, Nguyen, Ortega, Pacheco, Papan, Patel, Pellerin, Ramos, Ransom, Michelle Rodriguez, Rogers, Blanca Rubio, Schiavo, Schultz, Sharp-Collins, Solache, Soria, Stefani, Valencia, Ward, Wicks, Wilson, Zbur, Rivas

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

ABS, ABST OR NV: Addis, Arambula, Bains, Boerner, Flora, Gabriel, Irwin, McKinnor, Muratsuchi, Petrie-Norris, Quirk-Silva, Celeste Rodriguez

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