
SENATE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Senator Sabrina Cervantes, Chair
2025 - 2026 Regular Session

AB 2015 (Wicks) - Department of Transportation: third-party navigation applications: study and report

Version: April 14, 2026

Urgency: No

Hearing Date: August 3, 2026

Policy Vote: TRANS. 9 - 3

Mandate: No

Consultant: Mark McKenzie

Bill Summary: AB 2015 would require the Department of Transportation (Caltrans) to conduct a comprehensive study on the impact of third-party navigation applications (apps) on the state highway system and local streets and roads, and report recommendations to the Legislature by January 1, 2028.

Fiscal Impact:

- Caltrans estimates one-time costs of approximately \$6.1 million (State Highway Account) to complete the study and report to the Legislature by January 1, 2028, including \$3.5 million for a consultant contract and approximately \$2.6 million for 11.0 PY of one-year limited term positions to support study oversight, coordination, technical review, and report development. Caltrans indicates that the magnitude of these costs is partially driven by the accelerated timeframes specified in the bill. See Staff Comments.
- The California Transportation Agency (CalSTA) indicates that any costs to consult with Caltrans for the study and report would be minor and absorbable. (State Highway Account)

Background: Existing law establishes Caltrans and vests the department with full possession and control of the state highway system. While cities and counties generally have the authority to control construct, improve, and maintain local streets and roads, state law provides some limitations when it comes to public road access. For example, local agencies can adopt rules and regulations prohibiting entry or exit from any street, but only if it is necessary to implement the circulation element of its General Plan. Existing law also authorizes local agencies to adopt an ordinance to implement a “slow streets” program, which may include closures to vehicular traffic or through vehicular traffic of neighborhood local streets with connections to citywide bicycle networks, destinations that are within walking distance, or green space. Slow streets are typically enforced through the installation of traffic diverters, narrowing streets, creating turn restrictions, or implementing other traffic calming measures. However, local agencies cannot place gates or other devices which deny access to certain members of the public, while allowing others unrestricted access. If a local agency does erect traffic control devices, it must comply with standards and specifications set by Caltrans.

Since the advent of factory-equipped GPS navigation systems in vehicles beginning in the early 1990s, the use of real-time navigation tools while driving has become commonplace. With the launch of Waze in 2008, the use of community-driven data, in

which users submit real-time travel information that can be used to optimize routing based on travel patterns, has become the industry standard. As a result of this change over the last decade, navigation apps have increasingly harnessed the ability to dynamically divert traffic to avoid congestion. As noted in the policy analysis of this bill, several studies have concluded that providing drivers with route advice through navigation apps is a successful traffic management tool with the potential to reduce traffic externalities such as congestion, air pollution, and crashes. However, while third-party navigation apps have been shown to ease traffic congestion on busy commuter routes, in practice this is accomplished by diverting traffic onto local streets and roads. This congestion displacement oftentimes results in negative outcomes for local jurisdictions, including pavement damage and increased maintenance costs, traffic congestion on neighborhood streets, and safety concerns for vulnerable road users.

Proposed Law: AB 2015 would require Caltrans, in consultation with CalSTA and local authorities, to conduct a comprehensive study on the impact of third-party navigation apps on the state highway system and local streets and roads that specifically analyzes all of the following:

- Congestion displacement, by determining the extent to which third-party navigation apps shift congestion from state highways to local streets and roads, and the resulting changes to vehicle miles traveled (VMT)
- Local infrastructure impact, by determining the physical toll of increased traffic volume on pavement conditions and local maintenance costs that are associated with navigation apps.
- Safety metrics, by evaluating traffic safety on local roads affected by traffic diversion associated with navigation apps, including changes in collision rates, near-miss incidents, and impacts on existing “slow streets” or pedestrian heavy zones.
- Emergency response, by determining the impact of traffic diversion associated with navigation apps on police, fire, and emergency medical services response times.

The bill would require Caltrans to submit the study and a report to the Legislature by January 1, 2028 that includes policy recommendations to improve alignment between navigation apps and state and local traffic management goals, which may include the following:

- Data-sharing requirements between navigation apps and local jurisdictions.
- Frameworks for navigation apps to respect local traffic ordinances, such as weight limits or local access only designations.
- Technological standards to prioritize safety and emissions reductions over marginal time savings.

Related Legislation: AB 773 (Nazarian), Chap. 773/2021, authorized a local authority to adopt an ordinance to implement a slow streets program, which may include closures to vehicular traffic or through vehicular traffic of neighborhood local streets with connections to citywide bicycle networks, destinations that are within walking distance, or green space.

Staff Comments: This bill would require Caltrans to conduct a labor-intensive analysis-driven study regarding the impacts that third-party navigation apps have on the entirety of the state highway system and local streets and roads, and to submit study findings and policy recommendations to the Legislature by January 1, 2028. While the bill's

operative date is January 1, 2027, it is most likely that Caltrans would submit a budget change proposal through the 2027-28 budget process to receive resources by July 1, 2027. This would only provide Caltrans with six months to contract with a consultant, hire temporary staff, oversee and review the work, and submit findings and recommendations to the Legislature.

According to Caltrans, the costs noted above reflect the scope and complexity of the required statewide study, the compressed six-month timeline for completing both the study and final report, the need for specialized consultant expertise, and limited in-house capacity. The department anticipates needing approximately 11 limited-term positions to oversee the consultant, coordinate with state and local partners, manage procurement and public outreach, develop supporting data capabilities, review technical work products, and prepare the final report, while the consultant would develop the technical methodologies, analytical tools, and evaluation framework needed to assess the impacts of third-party navigation app traffic diversion on safety, congestion, emergency response, and local transportation networks. Caltrans notes that the compressed six-month implementation timeline significantly increases the department's resource needs, particularly for limited-term staff needed to manage multiple workstreams at the same time.

Recommended Amendments: The Committee may wish to amend the bill to extend the study and report due date to mitigate costs to Caltrans.

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