
CONSENT

Bill No: AB 2372
Author: Hoover (R)
Amended: 6/4/26 in Senate
Vote: 21

SENATE TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE: 13-0, 6/23/26
AYES: Cortese, Strickland, Archuleta, Arreguin, Blakespear, Dahle, Gonzalez, Grayson, Menjivar, Richardson, Seyarto, Valladares, Wiener

SENATE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE: Senate Rule 28.8

ASSEMBLY FLOOR: 77-0, 5/14/26 (Consent) - See last page for vote

SUBJECT: Vehicles: tolls

SOURCE: California Ambulance Association

DIGEST: This bill provides that any privately owned or operated ambulances licensed by the California Highway Patrol (CHP) to operate in response to emergency calls may be exempt from paying a toll on a vehicular crossing, toll highway, or high-occupancy toll (HOT) lane.

ANALYSIS:

Existing law:

- 1) Defines “authorized emergency vehicle” to mean, among other entities:
 - a) Any publicly owned and operated ambulance, lifeguard, or lifesaving equipment or any privately owned or operated ambulance licensed by the Commissioner of CHP to operate in response to emergency calls;
 - b) Any publicly owned vehicle operated by any federal, state, or local agency, department, or district employing peace officers, as specified;

- c) Any vehicle owned or operated by a federally recognized Indian tribe used in responding to emergency, fire, ambulance, or lifesaving calls, as specified; and,
 - d) Any vehicle for which an authorized emergency vehicle permit has been issued by CHP.
- 2) Defines “toll facility” to include a toll road, high-occupancy vehicle lane, toll bridge, or a vehicular crossing for which payment of a toll or other charge is required.
- 3) Defines “urgent response or call” to mean an incident or circumstance that requires an immediate response to a public safety-related incident but does not warrant the use of emergency warning lights. Stipulates that “urgent” does not include any personal use, commuting, training, or administrative uses.
- 4) Exempts an authorized emergency vehicle from the requirement to pay a toll or other charge on a vehicular crossing, toll highway, or HOT lane, if all of the following conditions are satisfied:
- a) The authorized emergency vehicle is properly displaying an exempt California license plate, and is properly identified or marked as an authorized emergency vehicle, including, but not limited to, displaying an external surface-mounted red warning light, blue warning light, or both, and displaying public agency identification, including, but not limited to, “Fire Department,” “Sheriff,” “Police, or “Ambulance”;
 - b) The vehicle is being driven while responding to or returning from an urgent or emergency call, engaged in an urgent or emergency response, or engaging in a fire station coverage assignment directly related to an emergency response; and,
 - c) The driver of the vehicle determines that the use of the toll facility shall likely improve the availability or response and arrival time of the authorized emergency vehicle and its delivery of essential public safety services.
- 5) Requires the owner or operator of a toll facility, upon the request of a public or private local emergency service provider, to enter into an agreement to establish mutually agreed upon terms for the use of a toll facility, including, but not limited to, being exempt from toll payment. An owner or operator of a toll facility may adopt a policy that meets or exceeds existing law, but if an emergency service provider or the owner or operator of a toll facility opts to

terminate an agreement, existing law would apply to the emergency service provider and the toll facility.

This bill provides that any privately owned or operated ambulances licensed by CHP to operate in response to emergency calls may be exempt from paying a toll on a vehicular crossing, toll highway, or high-occupancy toll lane.

Comments

- 1) *Purpose of the bill.* According to the author, “The use of toll roads is a crucial component of emergency response operations as it allows first responders to reach critical situations more efficiently, reducing travel time, and improving patient outcomes. While current law exempts public emergency vehicles from paying toll fees when responding to and returning from emergency calls, this exemption does not extend to private ambulance providers. As a result, private ambulance companies face significant financial burdens due to toll costs, despite performing the same life-saving services as public ambulance providers. AB 2372 will bring much-needed financial equity to an industry already facing significant economic challenges by ensuring that private ambulance providers qualify for the same toll exemptions.”
- 2) *Emergency vehicles use of toll facilities.* The use of toll roads has become a necessity for first responders traveling to emergency situations. As a result of increased wildfires across the state, the COVID-19 pandemic, and staffing shortages, first responders of all kinds are traveling farther distances in order to respond to life threatening emergencies.

AB 254 (Jeffries, Chapter 425, Statutes of 2009), created an exemption that allows authorized emergency vehicles to utilize all toll facilities, including HOT lanes, while responding to an incident, in order to decrease travel time. Specifically, authorized emergency vehicles are exempt from tolls on a toll road, HOT lane, toll bridge, toll highway, or vehicular crossing while traveling to an urgent or emergency call, under certain circumstances. Current law requires emergency vehicles to have an exempt California license plate, and be properly identified or marked as an emergency vehicle, including warning lights and public agency identification.

- 3) *How do tolls work in California?* Toll systems in California rely on a few methods for registering a person’s use of a toll facility and payment of the tolls. First is via a vehicle-mounted toll tag or sticker transponder that is read by antennae and associated electronically to a person’s FasTrak account. Second, license plate readers are cameras that are positioned in various entrances and/or

exits to the toll lane or bridge to record images of the license plate as a vehicle passes. Tolls are assessed electronically to a person's account or to a one-time payment transaction. Additionally, if a person has no transponder, the license plate information can be used to send a toll invoice to the registered owner of the vehicle.

- 4) *How do toll operators implement the emergency vehicle exemption?* Although authorized emergency vehicles are exempt from tolls in some circumstances, current law authorizes the toll operator to charge the authorized emergency vehicle public agency for any vehicles that have entered and used the toll facility. The charge can then be annulled with the written certification from a fire chief, police chief, county sheriff, head of the public agency, ambulance corporation chief executive, or designee, that the authorized emergency vehicle was responding to or returning from an emergency call, and the agency is exempt from the payment of the toll. This back and forth review can be an administrative burden for both the toll operator and the public agencies.

Current law also allows for agencies to enter into agreements, with mutually agreed upon terms, with toll operators; however, contracts can vary across the state. For example, CHP has successfully implemented an ongoing agreement with toll agencies. Essentially, the agreement allows the public agency that owns and operates the authorized emergency vehicles to identify the eligible vehicles via license plates. The toll agencies set up a so-called "non-revenue" account with the public agency, free of charge, and register the license plates for plate readers and may issue transponders for use. This way the public agency is not issued a toll invoice for use of the facilities. The public agency can access its account at any time and update authorized vehicles. This type of agreement could be replicated by public agencies and private ambulance companies across the state.

- 5) *Private ambulances are not automatically exempt.* According to the California Ambulance Association, the sponsors of this bill, there are approximately 715 public and private ambulance services statewide, of which 170 are private, representing 74% of the ambulances. Additionally, California has 3,600 licensed ambulances covering 337 emergency ambulance service areas, of which more than 220 are served by private ambulance companies.

Current law exempts authorized emergency vehicles displaying a California exempt license plate from paying any vehicular tolls when driving to and returning from an emergency call. Although private ambulance providers are not explicitly covered under this exemption, due to the fact that they do not

have an exempt license plate, there is no prohibition for toll operators to enter into an agreement with them. In fact, in his veto message of AB 697 (Fong, 2017), which would have exempted privately owned emergency ambulances from requirements to pay tolls, Governor Brown stated, “Under existing law, the exemption sought by this bill can be granted by toll facility authorities and no evidence has been presented to show why the state should now step in.”

- 6) *AB 2372 seeks to finally settle the question.* Numerous bills have been approved by the Legislature in recent years to further clarify that private ambulance companies can enter into agreements with tolling agencies for use of the toll facility, which may include being exempt from tolls. Specifically, AB 2270 (Seyarto, Chapter 497, Statutes of 2022), required toll operators to develop and enter into agreements with authorized emergency services providers upon request of the agency to further streamline the toll exemption process. Additionally, the law stipulates the agreements must be mutually agreed upon terms.

AB 902 (Rodriguez, Chapter 124, Statutes of 2023), built upon this process by adding “private or public” to the emergency service providers who can request the development of an agreement with toll operators. It also clarified that the agreements may include being exempted from toll payments. Again, AB 902 retained the requirements that the agreements must be mutually agreed upon terms.

Finally, AB 1114 (Avila Farias, Chapter 87, Statutes of 2025), added “Ambulance,” in addition to “Fire Department”, “Sherriff” or “Police,” to the authorized emergency vehicle agency identification required to be displayed to be exempt from tolls or other charges. The bill also clarified that an ambulance corporation chief executive can certify a vehicle was responding to an emergency when billed for a toll.

However, there has not been much progress on agreements for private ambulances. According to the Transportation Corridor Agencies (TCA), which operates toll roads in Orange County, as of last year, they have only been approached by one ambulance company to pursue an agreement. Additionally, the Orange County Transportation Authority (OCTA), who operates the 91 Express Lanes, reports that they had received one request to waive tolls and penalties for a private ambulance. That request was made through the local fire authority who contracts for services with the private ambulance company, and the authority verified that the toll violation was incurred while responding to an emergency.

Additionally, it appears that tolling authorities differ in how they interpret existing law when entering into these agreements. To try to ensure that existing law is implemented uniformly, the California Toll Operators Committee (CTOC) developed a process for exempting private ambulances from tolls. CTOC is made up of the state's 13 toll agencies and serves as the statewide oversight and standards committee for tolling interoperability. Specifically, CTOC states that "An agreement will need to be entered into with each agency from which the ambulance company is seeking toll exemption. Some toll agencies have voluntarily agreed to waive some conditions specified in Cal. Vehicle Code."

This bill clarifies that any privately owned or operated ambulance licensed by CHP to operate for emergency calls, in addition to vehicles displaying an exempt license plate, are eligible to be exempt from paying tolls when driving to and returning from an emergency call. The bill intends to ensure that private ambulance companies can enter into agreements with tolling agencies for use of the toll facility.

CHP regulates and certifies privately owned emergency ambulance operators and their associated ambulances. As part of the certification process, the company as a whole undergoes a comprehensive review and vetting process. Once all applicable statutory, regulatory, and administrative requirements have been satisfied, CHP issues an Emergency Ambulance Operator License, certifying the entity as an authorized privately owned emergency ambulance operator. Following licensure, each vehicle intended to be deployed as an emergency ambulance must successfully complete an initial CHP inspection. Upon successful completion of the inspection, a CHP Emergency Ambulance Permit/Certificate is issued for that vehicle.

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

SUPPORT: (Verified 8/3/26)

California Ambulance Association (Source)
Amwest Ambulance
California Association of Highway Patrolmen
Desert Ambulance Service, INC.
Falck Usa, INC.
Lifeline Ambulance
Lifewest Ambulance
Maxcare Ambulance
Medic Ambulance

Norcal Ambulance
Royal Ambulance INC
Southern California Ambulance Association

OPPOSITION: (Verified 8/3/26)

None received

ARGUMENTS IN SUPPORT: Writing in support of the bill, the Southern California Ambulance Association, states, “Toll roads are an important component of ambulance operations in Southern California, allowing providers to move patients, crews, and resources more efficiently across large and heavily traveled service areas. While current law exempts public emergency vehicles from toll fees when responding to and returning from emergency calls, current law is ambiguous as to whether that exemption extends to private ambulance providers.

“AB 2372 addresses this issue by clarifying that ambulances operated by private ambulance providers may also be exempt from paying toll fees.”

ASSEMBLY FLOOR: 77-0, 5/14/26

AYES: Addis, Aguiar-Curry, Ahrens, Alanis, Alvarez, Ávila Farías, Bains, Bauer-Kahan, Bennett, Berman, Boerner, Bonta, Bryan, Calderon, Caloza, Carrillo, Castillo, Chen, Connolly, Davies, DeMaio, Dixon, Elhawary, Ellis, Fong, Gabriel, Gallagher, Garcia, Gipson, Jeff Gonzalez, Mark González, Hadwick, Haney, Harabedian, Hart, Hoover, Irwin, Jackson, Johnson, Kalra, Krell, Lackey, Lee, Lowenthal, Macedo, McKinnor, Muratsuchi, Nguyen, Ortega, Pacheco, Papan, Patel, Patterson, Pellerin, Petrie-Norris, Quirk-Silva, Ramos, Ransom, Michelle Rodriguez, Rogers, Blanca Rubio, Sanchez, Schiavo, Schultz, Sharp-Collins, Solache, Soria, Stefani, Ta, Tangipa, Valencia, Wallis, Ward, Wicks, Wilson, Zbur, Rivas

NO VOTE RECORDED: Arambula, Flora, Celeste Rodriguez

Prepared by: Melissa White / TRANS. / (916) 651-4121
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**** END ****