

ASSEMBLY THIRD READING  
AB 2541 (Mark González)  
As Amended March 26, 2026  
Majority vote

## SUMMARY

Requires the Arts Council to apply to the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) to sponsor "The Lowrider" specialized license plate.

### Major Provisions

- 1) Requires DMV, in consultation with the Arts Council, to design the Lowrider License Plate and that the plate shall reflect lowrider culture and heritage.
- 2) Requires DMV, in consultation with the California Highway Patrol (CHP), to determine whether the design obscures the readability of the license plate.
- 3) Designates the proceeds of the plate, upon appropriation by the Legislature, to fund projects related to the purpose of supporting lowrider arts, cultural preservation efforts, youth engagement programs, public exhibitions, community-based cultural events, and educational initiatives that celebrate and preserve the history and cultural contributions of lowrider communities in California.
- 4) Specifies that the Arts Council shall prioritize nonprofit entities with a mission of supporting the lowrider community and Latino culture.
- 5) Make various findings and declarations about lowriders.

## COMMENTS

Candy paint jobs with glimmering specks of metallic. Custom upholstery of magenta velvet. Bouncing hydraulics cruising low and slow. The names 'Purple Rain' and 'Erotic City' gleaming from the lacquered frames." According to Smithsonian Magazine, these are the words that could only describe the famous lowriders belonging to L.A.'s Chicano community.

Cruising in lowriders has been an important subculture in California for decades, popularized by Chicano communities after World War II as the "hot rod" trend began to sweep the country. Lowriders are customized cars with lowered bodies, often painted in colorful designs that may be fitted with hydraulics to allow height adjustable suspension. Lowriders are displayed in events involving cars slowly moving down a street in a repetitive manner, referred to as cruising. Lowriders have taken on a political function, with cruising events serving as fundraisers for the United Farm Workers Labor Union, political fundraisers, COVID-19 vaccine drives, and participating in the census.

Cruising became popularized nationally after the release of *American Graffiti*, the breakout film for George Lucas and Harrison Ford. *American Graffiti*, released in 1973, was a coming of age comedy-drama set in 1960s Modesto, California featuring a group of friends cruising the streets before heading off to college. The film was nominated for an Oscar for "best film", and the Library of Congress recognizes it as a film for preservation in the National Film Registry. It remains one of the most profitable movies ever made, grossing \$200 million on a less than a \$1

million budget. The summer after the movie came out, San Rafael's main street was clogged with cars seeking to reenact the movie's cruising scenes, but was subsequently shut down by police.

*A bill is not necessary to create a new specialized plate.* Creating a new specialized license plate does not require legislation. Members of the Legislature or private individuals can ask state agencies to sponsor a new plate. If there is a good plan in place to get to the 7,500 prepaid commitments, an agency would likely be willing to sponsor a plate because it would result in additional revenue for that agency.

One such agency that has taken advantage of this is the California Natural Resources Agency (CNRA). DMV provides a packet to state agencies on how to sponsor a plate. CNRA in this past year reached out to multiple professional sports teams and signed a deal with several sports teams. However, even after winning the Super Bowl in 2021, the Los Angeles Rams' plate has not received enough prepaid commitments to be created. The San Francisco 49ers had to pay for their fans' license plates in order for them to get past the 7,500 prepaid commitment thresholds to create a new license plate.

Legislative mandates for specialized plates are historically ineffective, with only a 16% success rate in meeting the 7,500-prepaid threshold since 2000. Furthermore, the existing program yields diminishing fiscal returns relative to marketing costs. Of the 12 legislatively sponsored plates approved since 2000, only two have met the threshold. Of the four that have passed since 2014, only one reached the threshold. In the 2015-16 legislative session, seven bills were introduced directing a state agency to sponsor a specialized license plate. All seven died in either the Senate or Assembly Appropriations Committee. In the 2017-2018 session, five specialized license plates were introduced. One made it to the Governor and was vetoed. In the 2019 session, two specialized license plates were introduced, and both were held in Senate Appropriations Committee. In the 2020 session, three bills were introduced. One died in Assembly Appropriations Committee, the other two were never set for a hearing. In 2021-2022 session two bills were held in Assembly Appropriations Committee. Two bills to renew applications for legacy license plates were introduced in the 2023-2024 session. Both were held on the Assembly Appropriations Committee. Last year one specialized license plate was introduced in the Assembly. It died in Assembly Appropriations Committee.

*Specialized license plates are not a strong source of revenue.* Data from the 2023 DMV Consolidated Report suggests that specialized plates are not a robust revenue source. Total revenue for the programs was \$11.3 million, but \$1 million (8%) was diverted to marketing and administration. The most successful plate brought in \$2.8 million and spent 21% of its revenue on marketing. Only three of the license plates brought in more than \$1 million. The newest license plate brought in less than \$200,000, suggesting new entries struggle to gain traction in a crowded market.

### **According to the Author**

"To continue California's legacy in celebrating diversity, honoring impact, and uplifting communities, AB 2541 will signal another wave of support for the lowrider community, all while bolstering arts programs across the state! This current federal administration is spreading hate and vitriol. The Lowrider License Plate Program is a visible symbol of cultural pride, heritage, and resilience. Together, the legislature can ensure that this modern symbol of resistance keeps rolling forward—cruising through our streets for generations to come."

**Arguments in Support**

According to Brown Issues, *the sponsor of this bill*, "For decades, California imposed fines, restrictions, and local anti-cruising ordinances that targeted the lowrider community. These policies criminalized cultural expression and attempted to suppress a movement rooted in identity, creativity, and community pride. Despite these barriers, lowriders continued to build, paint, and cruise, transforming cars into rolling works of art that reflect family, faith, and freedom. At a moment when diverse communities across the state continue to confront cultural erasure and political division, AB 2541 offers a positive and unifying path forward. Establishing the Lowrider Specialized License Plate affirms California's commitment to celebrating cultural traditions rooted in resilience and ensuring they continue to thrive."

**Arguments in Opposition**

None on file

**FISCAL COMMENTS**

According to Assembly Appropriations Committee:

- 1) DMV will incur implementation costs, likely in excess of \$150,000, if the specialized plate meets the 7,500 prepaid application threshold. DMV asserts it is unable to estimate these implementation costs because the department would incur them after the completion of DMV's comprehensive information technology overhaul, which DMV calls the "Enterprise Modernization Project – the Digital eXperience Project (DXP)," and that DMV would need to modify the new IT system to accommodate the new specialized plate program. DMV notes it would deduct these implementation costs from the fees collected by applicants for the new specialized plates.
- 1) The costs described above would be covered by funds in the Motor Vehicle Account (MVA), the main funding source of both the DMV and California Highway Patrol (CHP), which is facing insolvency. The Legislative Analyst's Office (LAO) advises, "Until a plan is put in place to address MVA's structural deficit, we recommend the Legislature set a high bar for considering approval of any proposals that create additional MVA cost pressures and accelerate the risk of insolvency."
- 2) The Arts Council notes that, while the bill creates a potential future revenue stream to support arts and cultural programming, it also generates immediate administrative workload and staffing needs prior to any revenue realization, as well as ongoing programmatic responsibilities if the plate is successfully issued.
- 3) The council identifies the following tasks the bill requires it to complete prior to receiving any revenue, and estimates needing about two-and-a-half positions (a manager, an analyst and half the time of a communications/public affairs specialist), costing around \$300,000 annually (General Fund): coordination with DMV, consulting on plate design, coordinating with CHP for license plate readability review, stakeholder engagement and publicity.

**VOTES****ASM TRANSPORTATION: 16-0-0**

**YES:** Wilson, Davies, Aguiar-Curry, Ahrens, Carrillo, Harabedian, Hart, Hoover, Jackson, Lackey, Macedo, Papan, Ransom, Rogers, Sharp-Collins, Ward

**ASM APPROPRIATIONS: 15-0-0**

**YES:** Wicks, Hoover, Aguiar-Curry, Calderon, Caloza, Dixon, Fong, Mark González, Krell, Pacheco, Pellerin, Sharp-Collins, Solache, Ta, Tangipa

**UPDATED**

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