
THIRD READING

Bill No: AB 382
Author: Berman (D)
Amended: 6/26/25 in Senate
Vote: 21

SENATE TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE: 15-0, 7/8/25

AYES: Cortese, Strickland, Archuleta, Arreguín, Blakespear, Cervantes, Dahle, Gonzalez, Grayson, Limón, Menjivar, Richardson, Seyarto, Umberg, Valladares

SENATE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE: 7-0, 8/29/25

AYES: Caballero, Seyarto, Cabaldon, Dahle, Grayson, Richardson, Wahab

ASSEMBLY FLOOR: 78-0, 6/2/25 - See last page for vote

SUBJECT: Pedestrian safety: school zones: speed limits

SOURCE: Author

DIGEST: This bill reduces the school zone speed limit from 25 miles per hour (mph) to 20 mph commencing, January 2029, and make available signage and posting options at local agency discretion.

ANALYSIS:

Existing law:

- 1) Sets 25 mph prima facie speed limit in school zones 500 feet from a school when children are present. (Vehicle Code Section (VEH) 22352).
- 2) Authorizes local authorities to set a 20 or 15 mph prima facie speed limit in a residence district within 500 feet of a school when children are present and the following factors apply:
 - a) There is a maximum of two traffic lanes; and,

- b) A maximum posted 30 mph prima facie speed limit immediately prior to and after the school zone. (VEH 22358.4)
- 3) Authorizes local authorities to set a 25 mph prima facie speed limit in a residence district within 500 to 1,000 feet from a school when children are present and the following factors apply:
 - a) There is a maximum of two traffic lanes; and,
 - b) A maximum posted 30 mph prima facie speed limit immediately prior to and after the school zone. (VEH 22358.4)
- 4) Establishes the school zone speed limit in the area approaching or passing a school building or the grounds that is contiguous to a highway and on which is posted a standard “SCHOOL” warning sign, while children are going to or leaving the school either during school hours or during the noon recess period. “School zone” also includes the area approaching or passing any school grounds that are not separated from the highway by a fence, gate, or other physical barrier while the grounds are in use by children if that highway is posted with a standard “SCHOOL” warning sign. (VEH 40802).

This bill:

- 1) Beginning January 1, 2029, reduces the speed limit in a school zone from 25 mph to 20 mph and requires local authorities to change local speed limit signs accordingly.
- 2) Authorizes a local authority to, by ordinance or resolution, determine and declare a speed limit of 20 mph in a school zone, until January 1, 2029.
- 3) Authorizes a local authority to use specific hours or flashing beacons to implement a school zone speed limit, in addition to the existing authority to use “when children are present.”
- 4) Defines “school zone” to mean an area of a highway within 500 feet of school grounds in any direction, unless otherwise posted, marked with appropriate signs giving notice of the area.
- 5) Defines “children are present” to mean whenever either of the following occurs:
 - a) Children are going to or leaving the school; or,

- b) School grounds are in use by children and the highway is posted with a standard “SCHOOL” warning sign.
- 6) Specifies “children are present” does not include children who are separated from the highway by a fence, gate, or other physical barrier.
- 7) Reduces restrictions on local jurisdictions’ authority to lower speed limits to 25 mph between 500 - 1,000 feet of a school.
- 8) Would make conforming changes to the definition of speed traps to account for the revised definition of school zones.

Comments

- 1) *Purpose of this bill.* According to the author, “California must implement policies that create safe, healthy, and equitable school zones so that all kids feel safe walking or biking to school, and are protected from speeding vehicles on roads designed for cars, rather than people. Research shows that reducing speed limits in school zones brings significant safety benefits, and the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends reducing speed limits to 20 mph or less to improve child pedestrian safety. AB 382 would increase safety around schools by lowering the speed limit to 20 miles per hour in a school zone. This bill would also provide local jurisdictions with flexibility and additional time to implement the lower speed limit beginning in 2029. California must act to create safer school zones for everyone walking or biking to school including children, families, teachers, and school staff.”
- 2) *School zones.* The purpose of a school zone is to alert drivers that greater attention is needed due a high concentration of children, many of whom are pedestrians or bicyclists. School zones are defined as the 500 feet surrounding a school and specifically include roadway segments approaching, adjacent to, and beyond school buildings or grounds, or along which school related activities occur. The standard speed limit in a school zone when children are present is 25 mph, although local jurisdictions may reduce speed limits to 20 or 15 mph if justified by an engineering and traffic survey.
- 3) *Dangers of speed.* According to a study by AAA’s Foundation for Traffic Safety titled, *Impact Speed and a Pedestrian’s Risk of Severe Injury or Death*, “[r]esults show that the average risk of severe injury for a pedestrian struck by a

vehicle reaches 10% at an impact speed of 16 mph, 25% at 23 mph, 50% at 31 mph, 75% at 39 mph, and 90% at 46 mph. The average risk of death for a pedestrian reaches 10% at an impact speed of 23 mph, 25% at 32 mph.” The study also found that results vary significantly by age. As part of the city’s Safe Systems Vision Zero project, the Seattle Department of Transportation reports, “[a] driver’s field of vision increases as speed decreases. At lower speeds, drivers can see more of their surroundings and have more time to see and react to potential hazards.” Furthermore, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) identified that higher speeds extend the time it takes a vehicle to stop, among numerous other increased dangers, such as limiting a driver’s ability to steer safely around a hazard in the road.

- 4) *Lowering speed limits in school zones.* AB 382 would lower the school zone speed limit from 25 mph to 20 mph by January, 2029. California is in the minority of states with a school zone speed limit greater than 20 mph, although, as mentioned, local jurisdictions currently have the flexibility to lower speed limits under certain conditions. According to the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), “[b]ased on international experience and implementation in the United States, the use of 20 mph speed zones or speed limits in urban core areas where vulnerable users share the road environment with motorists may result in further safety benefits.” FHWA justifies this recommendation by reporting that, “[a] driver may not see or be aware of the conditions within a corridor, and may drive at a speed that feels reasonable for themselves but may not be for all users of the system, especially vulnerable road users, including children and seniors.”
- 5) *What does “when children are present” really mean?* In January 2020, California State Transportation Agency (CalSTA), in conjunction with a legislatively established Task Force, released the *CalSTA Report of Findings: AB 2363 Zero Traffic Fatalities Task Force*. The report includes finding and recommendation in four categories: establishing speed limits, engineering, enforcement, and education. This bill includes a recommendation from the task force that has not been addressed: clarifying “when children are present” for school zone speed limits.

Currently, California uses the metric “when children are present” to establish the school zone speed limit. For example, the normal speed limit on a road may be 35 mph, but when children are present the driver must slow to 25 mph, or slower depending on the signage. The majority of other states authorize the use of other metrics to establish the school zone speed limit, as concerns have been

raised that “when children are present” is vague and has a low compliance rate. The California Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (CAMUTCD) specifically prohibits school zone signs from using language other than “when children are present” in order to conform to California law. According to the CAMUTCD, “this condition can apply at any time of day or any day of the week.” AB 382 seeks to bring greater clarity to this definition, specifying that “when children are present” means either children are going to or leaving the school, or school grounds are in use by children and the road is appropriately signed.

- 6) *Flashing beacons or timeframes.* This bill authorizes local jurisdictions to switch their school zone speed limit signs from “when children are present” to speed limits established by timeframes or flashing beacons. Both of these standards are commonly used in school zones across the country. Visual representations of the two new school zone signage options that would be authorized for use under this bill are available on FHWA’s MUTCD page 973, specifically, Figure 7B-1. Signs in School Areas and at School Crossings – *School Speed Limit Assembly* (see footnote for link).¹

Timeframe-based signs display the school zone speed limit and windows of time that the reduced speed limit is in effect. This metric may provide greater clarity to drivers so they know when they must follow the reduced school zone speed limit—rather than asking drivers to assess the roadway for children. One drawback of this metric is that it may not provide protection for children leaving school grounds at abnormal hours, such as children leaving afterschool activities. This bill grants local jurisdictions the authority to determine which specific hours to use in order to account for unique local conditions.

Flashing beacons establish a speed limit “when flashing” and would typically be calibrated to times with high concentrations of children, such as right before or after school. Research has shown that school zone signs with flashing beacons are more effective in slowing traffic than those without flashing beacons. These signs provide greater flexibility to local jurisdictions to turn the flashing beacons on during high pedestrian traffic times outside of normal hours—such as back-to-school nights or sporting events.

- 7) *Merits of a two-step reduction in speed.* Current law allows local jurisdictions to set a 25 mph school zone speed limit in the broader area around a school zone—specifically within 500 – 1,000 ft. of a school zone, under specific

¹ https://mutcd.fhwa.dot.gov/pdfs/11th_Edition/part7.pdf

conditions. This buffer area is sometimes referred to as an extended school zone and it serves a number of safety purposes. The wider area around a school may still have a high concentration of children walking to and from school.

Additionally, research has shown that a two-step reduction in speed can improve compliance with the school zone speed limit and effectively lower speeds. For example, on a 30 mph road a driver may be more likely to decelerate to 25 mph first, and again down to 20 mph after a few hundred feet. The two-step reduction also reduces collisions that may occur from sudden breaking to comply with the reduced speed limit. Under current law, this extended school zone may only be established on roads with a posted speed limit of 30 mph or slower. This bill removes the 30 mph roadway limitation because, as this bill's sponsors argue, the benefits of the two-step reduction in speed would have even greater applicability on faster roads.

Related/Previous Legislation

AB 2583 (Berman, 2024) – Was nearly identical to this bill. *This bill was held in Senate Appropriations Committee.*

AB 321 (Nava, Chapter 384, Statutes of 2008) – Permitted a local government to declare a speed limit of 15 miles per hour in school zones and to expand the distance a 25 mile per hour school zone may be in force to 1,000 feet from the school.

SB 632 (Cannella, 2015) – Would have established a 15 miles per hour speed limit in school zones. *This bill failed in this committee.*

AB 2363 (Friedman, Chapter 650, Statutes of 2018) – Created the Zero Traffic Fatalities Task Force.

AB 43 (Friedman, Chapter 690, Statutes of 2021) – Granted Caltrans and local authorities' flexibility in setting speed limits based on recommendations the Zero Traffic Fatality Task Force made in January 2020.

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

According to the Senate Appropriations Committee:

- Unknown significant state-mandated local costs, likely in the millions of dollars in the aggregate, for local jurisdictions to change out signage at each school site by January 1, 2029 to reflect a 20 mph prima facie speed limit in school zones.

These costs are likely to be reimbursable by the state, subject to a determination by the Commission on State Mandates. (General Fund)

- The Department of Transportation (Caltrans) would incur minor costs to update the California Manual on Uniform Traffic Devices for speed limit policies related to school zones. In addition, Caltrans would incur one-time costs, likely in the low hundreds of thousands of dollars, to replace speed limit signs in the state highway rights-of-way for the 585 school sites that are located along the state highway system. These costs could be higher if support posts require replacement and if flashing beacons are installed. (State Highway Account)
- The Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) would incur costs to update automated knowledge exams and eLearning modules to account for changes to speed limits in school zones, and for IT improvements to its driver's license systems to account for the separate Vehicle Code violation for the new 20 mph prima facie speed limit beginning in 2029. DMV indicates that costs to update driver's license systems are unknown at this time because the department's Enterprise Modernization Project efforts are currently underway. Staff notes that the Motor Vehicle Account has a structural imbalance, and without corrective action, the fund will be insolvent in the next budget year. (Motor Vehicle Account)

SUPPORT: (Verified 8/29/25)

Active San Gabriel Valley
American Academy of Pediatrics, California
Bike Culver City
Bike East Bay
Bike Long Beach
Calbike
California School Employees Association
Car-lite Long Beach
Circulate San Diego
City of El Cerrito
City of Foster City
City of Mountain View
City of Redwood City
City of San Jose
Costa Mesa Alliance for Better Streets
East Bay for Everyone
Everybody's Long Beach

Fresno Unified School District
 Glendale Yimby
 Long Beach Bike Co-op
 Los Angeles County Office of Education
 Los Angeles Unified School District
 Move LA
 Napa County Bicycle Coalition (napa Bike)
 Norwalk Unides
 Oakland Unified School District
 Remake Irvine Streets for Everyone (RISE)
 San Diego County Bicycle Coalition
 San Francisco Bicycle Coalition
 Santa Clara County Office of Education
 Spur
 Streets are for Everyone
 Streets are for Everyone
 Streets for All
 Strong Towns Artesia
 Strong Towns Santa Barbara
 Transportation Agency for Monterey County
 Walk San Francisco

OPPOSITION: (Verified 8/29/25)

National Motorists Association

ASSEMBLY FLOOR: 78-0, 6/2/25

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

NO VOTE RECORDED: Ta

**** **END** ****