
THIRD READING

Bill No: AB 382
Author: Berman (D)
Amended: 9/4/25 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: Streets for All

DIGEST: This bill reduces the school zone speed limit from 25 miles per hour (mph) to 20 mph commencing, January 2031, and make available signage and posting options at local agency discretion.

Senate Floor Amendments of 9/4/25 further delayed implementation of the bill from 2029 to 2031.

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, 2031, 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, 2031.
- 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) Makes conforming changes to the definition of speed traps to account for the revised definition of school zones.

Comments

- 1) *Purpose of the 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 2031. 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." 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.* This bill would lower the school zone speed limit from 25 mph to 20 mph by January, 2031. 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.” This bill 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.

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

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 9/4/25)

Streets for All (source)
 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
Cleaneearth4kids.org
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
Norwalk Unides
Oakland Unifed School District
Remake Irvine Streets for Everyone
San Diego County Bicycle Coalition
San Francisco Bicycle Coalition
Santa Clara County Office of Education
Spur
Streets are for Everyone
Strong Towns Artesia
Strong Towns Santa Barbara
Transportation Agency for Monterey County
Walk San Francisco

OPPOSITION: (Verified 9/4/25)

National Motorists Association

ARGUMENTS IN SUPPORT: Writing in support, Fresno Unified School District states, “California has one of the fastest speed limits in school zones of any state. This often creates dangerous situations for students, families, teachers, and staff as they travel to and from school. Every year, there are injuries and even deaths as a result of high-speed limits that school districts have no abilities to change.

“Our school communities should feel safe getting to and leaving school every day. Families should not have to fear for their children’s safety. AB 382 will create

safer roads around our schools, lower the speed limit, and empower local governments to further lower speed limits to 15 mph where they deem appropriate.”

ARGUMENTS IN OPPOSITION: Writing with an oppose unless amended position, the National Motorists Association states, “[t]he current draft of AB-382 proposes substantial changes to California’s school zone speed limit framework, raising serious concerns for traffic engineers. Most notably, beginning January 1, 2029, the bill mandates a 20 mph speed limit in all school zones statewide—defined as any road segment within 500 feet of school grounds in any direction. (This could result in 20 mph school zones extending more than a quarter mile.) The bill also permits 25 mph school zone speed limits within 500 to 1000 feet of school grounds regardless of the roadway’s design, number of lanes, or prevailing speed. This marks a sharp departure from current law, which only allows reduced 25 mph limits within 500 to 1000 feet of school grounds in residence districts or on two-lane residential roadways with a speed limit of 30 mph or lower while children are going to or leaving the school, either during school hours or during the noon recess period. As amended, the bill is ambiguous as to whether these 25 zones are only active when the school zone speed limit is active or at any time regardless of the presence of school children. (This illustrates the risks of excluding engineering input from critical traffic safety decisions.”

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

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9/8/25 21:10:19

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