

---

## SENATE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Senator Anna Caballero, Chair  
2025 - 2026 Regular Session

---

### AB 902 (Schultz) - Transportation projects: barriers to wildlife movement

**Version:** July 10, 2025

**Urgency:** No

**Hearing Date:** August 18, 2025

**Policy Vote:** TRANS. 12-2, N.R.&W. 5 - 2

**Mandate:** Yes

**Consultant:** Mark McKenzie

**Bill Summary:** AB 902 would require the lead agency on certain transportation infrastructure projects to incorporate wildlife passage features to feasibly avoid, minimize, and mitigate impairment to wildlife connectivity into those projects, as specified.

#### **Fiscal Impact:**

- Unknown, likely significant mandated costs for local agencies, when acting as lead agencies on qualifying transportation infrastructure projects, to conduct additional planning, study, and analysis, develop strategies to remediate barriers, and incorporate additional features into those projects to avoid, minimize, and mitigate impairment to wildlife connectivity. Mandated costs imposed on certain local agencies (cities, counties, and some special districts) would likely be reimbursable by the state, subject to a determination by the Commission on State Mandates. (General Fund)
- Unknown major transportation fund cost pressures. This bill would significantly increase transportation infrastructure project costs for certain highway and rail projects that are initiated on or after January 1, 2028 in identified connectivity areas by requiring the incorporation of additional wildlife passage features to avoid, minimize, and mitigate impacts to fish, wildlife, and habitat. Adding costs to individual projects may result in the funding of fewer overall transportation infrastructure improvements, or create pressures to provide additional funding for those projects from various sources, including the General Fund and various transportation funds, including the Road Maintenance and Rehabilitation Account, Public Transportation Account, State Highway Account, Advance Mitigation Account, local funds, and federal funds.
- The Department of Transportation (Caltrans) indicates that it would incur unknown costs for any projects that would impact the state highways system. Staff notes that the bill explicitly excludes projects on the state highway system when Caltrans is the lead agency. Caltrans notes, however, that local projects on roadways that intersect or connect to the state highway system, or any Caltrans projects that require the relocation of local roadways, could result in increased Caltrans costs. These costs are unknown and would depend upon the features of an individual project. (State Highway Account)
- The Department of Fish and Wildlife (DFW) indicates that any costs to review and approve the use of compensatory mitigation credits, as specified. (Fish and Game Preservation Fund or General Fund)

**Background:** Existing law defines a “wildlife corridor” as a habitat linkage that joins two or more areas of wildlife habitat, allowing for fish passage or the movement of wildlife from one area to another, and requires DFW to investigate, study, and identify those areas in the state that are most essential as wildlife corridors and habitat linkages. In 2020, DFW conducted an initial assessment of priority barriers to wildlife movement throughout the state. The assessment identified 61 barriers as high priorities for remediation. DFW updated their assessment in 2022 in a report entitled Restoring California's Wildlife Connectivity 2022. As of June 2022, approximately 150 segments of linear infrastructure have been identified as wildlife barriers. Of those barrier segments, 62 were identified as priority wildlife barriers and 12 were included on the statewide top priority list. Nearly all the known barriers are associated with the state highway system, but some include railroads, canals, high-speed rail alignments, and local roads, while other segments may be impacted by more than one infrastructure type, such as a high-speed rail alignment along a highway.

Existing law defines “wildlife passage features” to mean “culverts, underpasses, overpasses, bridges, directional fencing, barrier breaks, wildlife monitoring devices or detection systems, elevated highway segments, or other features, supported by a functional or potentially functional ecological buffer of habitat on multiple approaches to a highway that encourage use of the feature and are designed to be managed or restored using the best available science to improve the ability of wildlife to safely traverse transportation infrastructure.” Several examples of these passage features include the Wallis Annenberg Wildlife Crossing in Los Angeles County, which is expected to be completed in 2026, as well as the construction of a number of wildlife underpasses along major corridors on Interstate 5 paired with continuous fencing to guide wildlife toward safe crossings.

Existing law, as enacted by AB 2344 (Friedman, Chap. 964/2022), requires Caltrans, in consultation with DFW, to establish an inventory of connectivity needs on the state highway systems where the implementation of wildlife passage features could reduce wildlife-vehicle collision or enhance wildlife connectivity. Existing law, as enacted by AB 1889 (Friedman, Chap. 686/2024), amongst other provisions, requires a city or county, upon the next revision of one or more general plan elements on or after January 1, 2028, to update the conservation element to identify and analyze wildlife passage features to ensure planned development does not undermine the effectiveness of those features.

Existing law, as enacted by SB 1 (Beall, Chap. 5/20107) establishes the Advance Mitigation Program within Caltrans to enhance communications between Caltrans and stakeholders to protect natural resources through project mitigation, accelerate project delivery, and improve environmental mitigation for planned transportation projects. SB 1 provided one-time funding of \$30 million for four years (\$120 million in total), which was deposited into the Advance Mitigation Account, and specified that funds may be used for specified activities, including, among others things, for purchasing, or funding the purchase of, credits from mitigation banks, conservation banks, or in-lieu fee programs approved by one or more regulatory agencies and, under certain circumstances, for implementing, or funding the implementation of, advance mitigation.

According to Caltrans' Wildlife Connectivity Barriers website, Caltrans currently has 15 remediation projects funded, 17 planned project locations, and 76 unfunded priorities.

In addition, the Wildlife Conservation Board, located within DFW, has funded over 25 wildlife crossing projects statewide in recent years.

**Proposed Law:** AB 902 would require a lead agency to incorporate wildlife passage features to feasibly avoid, minimize, and mitigate further impairment to wildlife connectivity into a transportation project that meets the following criteria:

- The project is in a connectivity area, as identified by DFW or in a local agency's general plan, as specified.
- The project may significantly impair wildlife connectivity.
- The project initiation phase begins on or after January 1, 2028.

The bill would only apply to transportation infrastructure projects that create a new highway or add a new lane to an existing highway, and explicitly excludes:

- Projects on the state highway system in which Caltrans is the lead agency.
- Projects for the operation, repair, maintenance, or minor alteration of existing transportation infrastructure, involving negligible or no expansion of use.
- Projects for the reconstruction or replacement of existing transportation facilities.
- Projects to create bicycle lanes and sidewalks within an existing right-of-way.

The bill would also authorize a lead agency to use approved compensatory mitigation credits to satisfy the requirements of the bill if DFW concurs with the use of those credits, as specified.

**Related Legislation:** AB 1889 (Friedman), Chap. 686/2024, required the conservation element of a local general plan to consider the impact of development on the movement of wildlife and habitat connectivity. The bill also required a city or county, upon the next revision of one or more general plan elements on or after January 1, 2028, to update the conservation element to, among other things, identify and analyze wildlife passage features to ensure that planned development does not undermine the effectiveness of those features.

AB 2344 (Friedman), Chap. 964/2022, required Caltrans, in consultation with DFW, to establish an inventory of connectivity needs on the state highway system where the implementation of wildlife passage features could reduce wildlife-vehicle collisions or enhance wildlife connectivity, as specified. Caltrans must publish the inventory and a list of funded transportation projects with wildlife passage features, as specified.

SB 790 (Stern), Chap 738/2021, authorized DFW to approve compensatory mitigation credits for certain wildlife connectivity actions that measurably improve habitat connectivity or wildlife migration, such as adding an overpass or underpass for a roadway, as provided.

-- END --