
SENATE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES AND WATER

Senator Josh Becker, Chair

2025 - 2026 Regular

Bill No: SB 1250 **Hearing Date:** April 21, 2026
Author: Cortese
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Urgency: No **Fiscal:** Yes
Consultant: Katharine Moore

Subject: State highway system: wildlife connectivity

SUMMARY

This bill would require the State Department of Transportation (Caltrans) to include wildlife connectivity assets in Caltrans' transportation asset management plan and further require Caltrans to develop a comprehensive approach to address wildlife connectivity needs on the state highway system with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, among other provisions, as provided.

BACKGROUND AND EXISTING LAW

The California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW)

CDFW is the state's trustee agency for fish and wildlife. The department's mission statement is "to manage California's diverse fish, wildlife, and plant resources, and the habitats upon which they depend, for their ecological values and for their use and enjoyment by the public." In general, the department implements and enforces the regulations set by the California Fish and Game Commission (commission), as well as providing biological data and expertise to inform the commission's decision-making process.

Caltrans

Caltrans has full possession and control of the state highway system, and is required to make improvements to and maintain the state highway system.

According to the Senate Transportation Committee's bill analysis, California's transportation system is one of the nation's most robust and multifaceted networks. There are approximately 175,600 lane miles in the state's public roads, of which the state highway system comprises approximately 50,000 miles. There are approximately 26,000 bridges and the state's highway/freeway system includes 12 primary interstate highways and over 200 State Routes. The state's public transit systems include intercity and commuter rail, and there are increasingly extensive bicycle transportation networks, including dedicated lanes.

SB 1 (Beall, Chapter 5, Statutes of 2017) created an Advance Mitigation Program (AMP) at Caltrans to protect natural resources through transportation project mitigation, among other things. The AMP requires that environmental impacts from transportation infrastructure projects be mitigated to the maximum extent required by law. Caltrans is required to consult with CDFW on the AMP. In the 2024 report to the Legislature regarding AMP, CDFW reported reviewing nine Caltrans Regional Advance Mitigation Needs Assessments which are used by Caltrans' Districts, when finalized, to scope advance mitigation projects. Among other recommendations in the report, CDFW

recommended early consultation by Caltrans in order to ensure the quality and effectiveness of habitat mitigation for future transportation projects.

Caltrans and CDFW have an established working relationship regarding wildlife connectivity.

Habitat connectivity and wildlife corridors

The state's transportation system – for example, highways, local roads, and rail – can be an obstacle for wildlife seeking to move between different parcels of the same type of habitat. Intact biological corridors help maintain healthy populations of plants and animals by allowing genetic exchange and species migration, among other things. Built infrastructure, such as wildlife crossings, decreases the incidence of fatal collisions by giving animals an alternative route to cross busy roads.

According to the UC Davis Road Ecology Center, wildlife-vehicle collisions occur across the state and impose significant ecological and economic costs – as much as \$250 million annually. There are identifiable hotspots for these collisions located statewide, and wildlife crossings can reduce the number of collisions appreciably. According to material provided by the author, wildlife crossings paired with continuous fencing can reduce large mammal-vehicle collisions by over 80% on average.

A crossing is typically an overpass or an underpass that allows animals to cross from one side of the road to the other. Since 2005, Caltrans has had a program to improve fish passages under roadways. In the last several years, the Legislature has appropriated funding for wildlife crossings, and passed multiple bills related to wildlife crossings, including over the proposed high-speed rail route between Southern California and Las Vegas. Additionally, the Wildlife Conservation Board has provided grants for dozens of wildlife crossing projects in recent years. One of these is the Wallis Annenberg Wildlife Crossing in Los Angeles County, which is expected to open later this year across Hwy-101 near Calabasas.

In 2022, CDFW released a list of priority wildlife movement barriers in the state. Of the 150 locations identified across the state, the report identified 62 priority barriers and 12 top statewide priorities. Many of these locations are on the state highway system and species such as deer, elk, mountain lions, amphibians, and reptiles are all affected.

According to the author, wildlife passage improvements are often addressed through stand-alone conservation projects, rather than being systematically incorporated into transportation planning. This can make it more difficult for the state to effectively address habitat fragmentation and wildlife mortality in a coordinated and efficient way.

The California Transportation Asset Management Plan (TAMP).

According to the Senate Transportation Committee's bill analysis, the TAMP is a strategic and systematic process aimed at operating, maintaining, upgrading, and expanding physical transportation assets effectively throughout their life cycle. The TAMP focuses on resource allocation and utilization to improve decision-making based on quality information and well-defined objectives. The TAMP is a coordinated plan by Caltrans and its partner agencies to maintain California's transportation infrastructure assets into the future. The TAMP includes state highway system assets and certain additional national highway system assets, and must be updated every four years to

incorporate improvements and re-evaluate conditions, targets, and performance. The TAMP combines these strategies into a constrained 10-year financial plan for projects and identifies the performance gap to achieve the 10-year targets that will improve the transportation system. Ultimately, the TAMP serves as the guide for the selection of projects in the State Highway Operation and Protection Program (SHOPP).

Existing law:

- 1) Establishes CDFW in the California Natural Resources Agency.
- 2) Vests CDFW with jurisdiction over the conservation, protection, and management of fish, wildlife, native plants, and habitat necessary for biologically sustainable populations of those species (Fish and Game Code (FGC) §1802).
- 3) Requires CDFW to investigate, study, and identify those areas in the state that are most essential as wildlife corridors and habitat linkages, as well as the impacts to those wildlife corridors from climate change, as provided (FGC §1930.5).
- 4) Authorizes CDFW to approve compensatory mitigation credits for wildlife connectivity actions taken under specified programs (FGC §§1955 *et seq.*).
- 5) Provides that Caltrans has full possession and control of the state highway system and requires Caltrans to make improvements to and maintain the state highway system (Streets and Highways Code (SHC) §§90, 91).
- 6) Requires Caltrans to prepare an annual report to the Legislature describing the status of progress in locating, assessing, funding, and remediating barriers to fish passage, and requires an assessment of potential barriers to fish passage prior to commencing project design (SHC §§156 *et seq.*).
- 7) Requires Caltrans, in consultation with the California Transportation Commission (CTC), to prepare a robust asset management plan to guide the selection of projects for the SHOPP.
- 8) Requires CTC, in connection with the asset management plan, to adopt targets and performance measures reflecting the state's transportation goals and objectives.
- 9) Declares the intent of the Legislature that Caltrans review the full extent of the state highway system, as currently maintained, in consultation with CDFW and with opportunities for the public to provide data input for consideration, to develop a comprehensive approach to address wildlife connectivity needs throughout the state with the goal of implementing measures that protect, conserve, and improve the state's unique wildlife, landscapes, and natural resources.
- 10) Requires Caltrans, in consultation with CDFW and other appropriate agencies, 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, and to update the inventory on a biennial basis, as provided.

PROPOSED LAW

This bill would:

- 1) Require the CTC in the TAMP to include target and performance measurement goals and objectives for wildlife connectivity assets that improve or maintain the connectivity of wildlife crossings, and further require Caltrans to include wildlife connectivity assets in the TAMP, as provided.
- 2) Require Caltrans, in consultation with CDFW, to evaluate the state highway system and develop a comprehensive approach to address wildlife connectivity needs throughout the state, as provided.
- 3) Require Caltrans and CDFW to jointly establish an inventory of wildlife connectivity needs on the state highway system, as specified.
- 4) Require Caltrans and CDFW to jointly develop and publish on Caltrans' website the inventory of wildlife connectivity needs, and further require both Caltrans and CDFW to jointly update the inventory biennially, as specified.
- 5) Further require Caltrans to develop and publish on its website a list of funded transportation projects with wildlife passage features that address wildlife connectivity needs. Require Caltrans to update the project list biennially, as specified.
- 6) Define a wildlife connectivity asset to mean an asset that links fragmented habitats, reduces roadkill, maintains species movements, or improves overall ecosystem health, while improving road safety and operations for all users.
- 7) Make multiple minor and technical clarifying changes.

ARGUMENTS IN SUPPORT

According to the author, "California's highways connect our communities and support the movement of people and goods across the state, but they also cut through some of California's most important landscapes and ecosystems. Too often, these roadways divide wildlife habitat and force animals into dangerous crossings that threaten both wildlife and motorists. California has invested in protecting its natural resources and biodiversity, yet our transportation planning system has not fully caught up with those goals. Wildlife crossings and habitat connectivity infrastructure are proven tools that allow animals to move safely across the landscape while reducing dangerous collisions on our roads. However, these solutions are still too often pursued as isolated projects rather than integrated into how we plan and maintain our highway system. SB 1250 takes a forward-looking approach by incorporating wildlife connectivity into the state's transportation planning process. By better aligning transportation planning with conservation goals, California can protect wildlife movement, strengthen ecosystem resilience, and ensure that our infrastructure works in harmony with the natural landscapes that make our state unique."

ARGUMENTS IN OPPOSITION

The California Building Industry Association (CBIA), taking an oppose unless amended position, writes that "CBIA supports the goal of improving wildlife connectivity on the state highway system and recognizes the author's commitment to this issue. Our

concerns relate to specific provisions that, without amendment, could create unintended consequences for housing production on private land adjacent to state highways.”

CBIA contends that “existing law is working” and that the changes proposed by the bill “raise three concerns for the homebuilding industry.” The concerns cited are CEQA exposure for private projects (where private projects adjacent to the state highway system near inventoried highway segments could be affected by the presence of the inventoried segments indicating biological sensitivity), an overbroad definition of “wildlife connectivity asset” (as this definition is not limited to physical infrastructure within Caltrans’ right-of-way it could include adjacent private lands and conservation areas), and the lack of landowner notice or participation in the designation of highway segments adjacent to private property as having connectivity needs.

CBIA requests a CEQA savings clause, a narrowed definition of “wildlife connectivity asset,” a provision for adjacent landowner notice and public comment, and four additional changes to narrow the scope.

COMMENTS

This bill is double-referred. This bill was double-referred to both the Senate Transportation Committee and this Committee. This Committee was the committee of second referral. Aspects of this bill under the jurisdiction of the Senate Transportation Committee are included here for completeness and context only. This bill passed the Senate Transportation Committee on a bipartisan 9 – 0 vote with 4 senators not voting.

Delayed SHOPP projects. As described in the Senate Transportation Committee’s bill analysis, increasing project costs and repairs associated with extreme weather events have negatively impacted the SHOPP’s fiscal condition in recent years. This has resulted in delaying a number of programmed projects and adjusting a number of carry over projects. The TAMP was also recently expanded to include complete street assets (e.g. pedestrian and bicycle assets). It is unclear how the recent addition of complete street assets and the proposed addition of wildlife connectivity assets and performance measures for wildlife connectivity assets will impact the fiscal condition of the SHOPP.

Revisit fish passages. The definition of fish passage in the Street and Highways Code is specific to anadromous fish (those that are born in fresh waters inland but migrate to and spend most of their time in the ocean before returning inland to spawn). The focus at the time was on the barrier some culverts under roadways presented to salmon and steelhead trout migration. The population of salmon and steelhead in the state’s inland waters has and had dropped precipitously due to numerous factors, and several species of salmon and steelhead are protected under the state and federal Endangered Species Acts. As interest in habitat connectivity has increased over the years, there are additional fish species whose movements are limited by poorly-designed culverts or other features. Separately, terrestrial species can also utilize large culverts as wildlife crossings.

As the bill moves forward, the author may wish to consider whether or not generalizing the definition of fish passage to include all fish species is warranted.

Recent related legislation

AB 902 (Schultz, 2025) would have established the Connected Communities Act to require a lead agency to incorporate appropriate wildlife passage features to feasibly avoid, minimize, and mitigate further impairment to wildlife connectivity into certain transportation infrastructure projects and exempted certain projects on the state highway system from these requirements where Caltrans is the lead agency, among other provisions, as provided. (*This bill was held on suspense in the Senate Appropriations Committee.*)

AB 1889 (Friedman, Chapter 686, Statutes of 2024) requires the conservation element of a local general plan to consider the impact of development on the movement of wildlife and habitat connectivity, and 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, as provided.

SB 960 (Wiener, Chapter 630, Statutes of 2024) requires Caltrans to include complete streets assets in its asset management plan, system highway management plan, and in the plain language performance report for the SHOPP. Further requires Caltrans to develop and adopt transit priority policy and guidelines, among other provisions.

AB 2320 (Irwin, 2024) would have made it the policy of the state to preserve, protect, and restore wildlife habitats and biodiversity through the acquisition and restoration of blocks of habitat and natural lands that are connected by wildlife corridors, as defined, and the infrastructure that supports wildlife corridors, and generalized the definition of fish passage project to apply to all fish, among other provisions. (*This bill was held on suspense in the Senate Appropriations Committee.*)

SB 145 (Newman/Friedman, Chapter 57, Statutes of 2023) provides, among other provisions, for three wildlife crossings to be built over the I-15 corridor and a proposed high-speed rail line.

AB 2344 (Friedman/Kalra, Chapter 964, Statutes of 2022) requires Caltrans, in consultation with CDFW and other appropriate agencies, to take actions to address wildlife connectivity needs related to the state highway system.

SB 790 (Stern, Chapter 738, Statutes of 2021) authorized CDFW 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.

SUGGESTED AMENDMENTS: none**SUPPORT**

The Nature Conservancy (sponsor)
350 Bay Area Action
350 Sacramento
Active San Gabriel Valley
Alameda County Resources Conservation District
All Hands Ecology

American River Conservancy
Animal Legal Defense Fund
ARC Solutions
Arroyos & Foothills Conservancy
Better World Group
Bolsa Chica Land Trust
CactusToCloud Institute
California Carnivores Program, UC Davis School of Veterinary Medicine
California Council of Land Trusts
California Habitat Conservation Planning Coalition
California Native Plant Society, Alta Peak Chapter
California Native Plant Society, Mojave Desert Chapter
CalWild
Center for Biological Diversity
Center for Environmental Health
Central Valley Partnership
Citizens for Los Angeles Wildlife
CleanEarth4Kids.org
Climate Action California
ClimatePlan
Coastal Environmental Rights Foundation
Coastal Policy Solutions
Coastal Ranches Conservancy
Consejo de Federaciones Mexicanas (COFEM)
County of Santa Clara
El Dorado County Transportation Commission
Endangered Habitats League
Environment California
Environmental Protection Information Center (EPIC)
Escondido Neighbors United
Friends Committee on Legislation of California
Friends of Harbors, Beaches and Parks
Friends of Plumas Wilderness
Friends of Rose Creek
Friends of the Dunes
Friends of the Inyo
Green Foothills
Greenbelt Alliance
GreenLatinos
Hills for Everyone
Humane World for Animals
In Defense of Animals
Land Trust of Santa Cruz County
Laguna Greenbelt, Inc.
Los Cerritos Wetlands Land Trust
Los Padres ForestWatch
Marin Conservation League
Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District
Morongo Basin Conservation Association
Mount Shasta Bioregional Ecology Center

National Wildlife Federation
Oswit Land Trust
Pathways for Wildlife
Peninsula Open Space Trust
Pew Charitable Trusts
Planning and Conservation League
Physicians for Social Responsibility, San Francisco Bay Chapter
Plumas Audubon Society
Preserve Calavera
Prosperity Action
Rails to Trails Conservancy
Resource Renewal Institute
Road Ecology Center, UC Davis
San Diego 350
San Diego Humane Society/Project Wildlife
San Francisco Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals
Santa Clara Valley Habitat Agency
Santa Clara Valley Open Space Authority
Save Mount Diablo
SC Wildlands
Sequoia Riverlands Trust
Shasta Land Trust
Sierra Club California
Sierra Nevada Alliance
Siskiyou Land Trust
Social Compassion in Legislation
Sonoma Ecology Center
Sonoma Land Trust
South Yuba River Citizens League
Streets For All
Sugar Pine Foundation
Temecular-Elsinore-Anza-Murrieta Resource Conservation District
The Climate Center
The Honorable Chuck Washington, Supervisor, District 3, County of Riverside
The Honorable Terra Lawson-Remer, Supervisor, District 3, County of San Diego
The Trust for Public Land
The Volgenau Foundation
The Wilderness Society
TreePeople
WILDCOAST
Wildlands Network
Wildlife Conservation Network
ZeroW.org

One individual

OPPOSITION

California Building Industry Association (unless amended)