
SENATE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Senator Sabrina Cervantes, Chair
2025 - 2026 Regular Session

SB 1250 (Cortese) - State highway system: wildlife connectivity

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Policy Vote: TRANS. 9 - 0, N.R. & W. 5 - 0

Urgency: No

Mandate: No

Hearing Date: May 4, 2026

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Bill Summary: SB 1250 would require the Department of Transportation (Caltrans) to include wildlife connectivity assets in the Transportation Asset Management Plan (TAMP) and require the California Transportation Commission (CTC) to adopt targets and performance measures reflecting state transportation goals and objectives for wildlife connectivity assets in connection with the TAMP, as specified.

Fiscal Impact:

- Caltrans anticipates unknown increased costs, potentially in the millions of dollars, to develop an inventory and set targets for wildlife connectivity assets for local roads that are part of the national highway system, which are also included in the TAMP. See Staff Comments. (State Highway Account)
- Unknown significant transportation fund cost pressures, to the extent that including wildlife connectivity assets in the TAMP results in the inclusion of connectivity projects in the SHOPP, or the addition of these features to other maintenance projects. This would result in cost pressures to provide more funding for SHOPP projects or reduce the number of projects that are funded. Staff notes that there has been a decline in available funding for SHOPP projects in recent years. See Staff Comments. (State Highway Account, Road Maintenance and Rehabilitation Account, federal funds).
- The Department of Fish and Wildlife (DFW) indicates that any new workload by requiring DFW to jointly develop and publish the inventory of connectivity needs, rather than work in a consultation role, would be absorbable. (Fish and Game Preservation Fund)
- The CTC indicates that any costs could be absorbed with existing resources. Specifically, any workload related to the adoption of targets and performance measures for wildlife connectivity in the TAMP could be addressed in the regular cycle of TAMP updates. (State Highway Account, Public Transportation Account)

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 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. According to Caltrans' July 1, 2024 Wildlife Connectivity Report, Caltrans has identified 31 remediation projects that have been funded, 37 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.

Existing law requires Caltrans, in consultation with CTC, to prepare a robust asset management plan to guide the selection of projects for the state highway operation and protection program. The TAMP is a strategic document designed to assess the health and condition of the state highway system and California's portion of the national highway system, including any local roads that are a part of that system. The document fulfills state planning goals as well as federal requirements for transportation funding. The TAMP includes an identification and assessment of the status and upkeep needs of physical assets. Pavement, bridges, drainage, and transportation management systems (technology such as traffic signals) are the primary asset classes. Nine supplementary asset classes, including complete streets, are also included to a more limited degree. The TAMP is updated every four years, and sets 2, 4, and 10-year performance targets for these assets and provides an analysis of the gap between current investments and what is needed to reach those targets. Specifically, the TAMP combines information 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.

State law also requires Caltrans to prepare a state highway operation and protection program (SHOPP), based on the TAMP, for the expenditure of transportation funds for major capital improvements that are necessary to preserve and protect the state highway system. Projects included in the SHOPP are limited to improvements related to the maintenance, safety, operation, and rehabilitation of state highways and bridges that do not add new capacity to the system.

Proposed Law: SB 1250 would require Caltrans to include wildlife connectivity assets in the TAMP. Specifically, this bill would:

- Define “wildlife connectivity asset” as 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.
- Requires Caltrans to include in the TAMP wildlife connectivity assets, including wildlife crossings, improved culverts and bridges, habitat corridors, and fencing guiding animals to crossings.
- Requires CTC to adopt targets and performance measures for wildlife connectivity assets that reflect the need for new assets and conditions of existing assets that improve or maintain the connectivity of wildlife crossings.
- Require, rather than stating that it is the intent of the Legislature, that Caltrans, in consultation with DFW and with public input, to develop a comprehensive approach to address wildlife connectivity needs throughout the state, as specified.
- Require Caltrans and DFW to jointly establish an inventory of wildlife connectivity needs on the state highway system, rather than requiring Caltrans, in consultation with DFW, to establish that inventory.
- Require Caltrans and DFW to jointly develop and publish the inventory of connectivity needs on the state highway system on Caltrans’ website, and to jointly update the inventory biennially, at a minimum, as specified.
- Make other conforming changes, as specified.

Related Legislation: AB 902 (Schultz), which was held on this Committee’s Suspense File last year, would have required 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.

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.

Staff Comments: The SHOPP is the State’s “fix-it-first” program for the rehabilitation and reconstruction of all state highways and bridges, the supporting infrastructure for those facilities (such as culverts, traffic management centers, safety roadside rest areas, and maintenance stations), and to address safety and emergency repair needs. The 2026 SHOPP is fiscally constrained by the State Transportation Improvement Program Fund Estimate and includes plans to implement \$17.9 billion in projects and

reserves over four years, covering Fiscal Years 2026-27 through 2029- 30. This is a net reduction in funding as compared to the 2024 SHOPP. Due to the reduced funding available in the 2026 Fund Estimate, a significant number and value of 2024 SHOPP projects were delayed, and carryover projects were also adjusted. Delaying projects increases costs due to construction cost escalation. The capacity to add new projects has been reduced, primarily due to the reduction in available funding and delaying of carryover projects within this SHOPP cycle. Staff notes that this bill could further exacerbate the funding condition of the SHOPP in the future, and create significant cost pressures, to the extent that including wildlife connectivity projects in the TAMP results in funding those projects in lieu of other maintenance and repair needs.

As noted above, The TAMP is a strategic document designed to assess the health and condition of the state highway system and California's portion of the national highway system, including any local roads that are a part of that system. Caltrans has worked with DFW to identify and compile an inventory of wildlife connectivity needs on the state highway system, and publishes a list of funded transportation projects with wildlife passage features. Caltrans indicates that the inclusion of wildlife connectivity assets in the TAMP, which includes local roads that are a part of the national highway system in addition to the state highway system, would expand their role in identifying an inventory of wildlife connectivity assets and set targets and performance measures on those local roads that are a part of the TAMP. Caltrans anticipates increased ongoing costs, potentially in the millions of dollars for additional positions, to conduct this additional workload that is outside the scope of their current requirements related to state highway system assets.

Recommended Amendments: The Committee may wish to consider an amendment to specify that the inclusion of wildlife connectivity assets in the TAMP is limited to those assets on the state highway system.

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