

Date of Hearing: June 22, 2026

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION

Lori D. Wilson, Chair

SB 1250 (Cortese) – As Amended May 14, 2026

SENATE VOTE: 37-0

SUBJECT: State highway system: wildlife connectivity

SUMMARY: Requires the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) to include wildlife connectivity assets and related targets and performance measures in the state’s transportation asset management plan (TAMP) and requires Caltrans to review, in consultation with the Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) the state highway system (SHS) to develop a comprehensive approach to address wildlife connectivity needs. Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Defines “wildlife connectivity asset” to mean a physical infrastructure asset on or within the right-of-way of transportation infrastructure that facilitates wildlife passage across transportation infrastructure and reduces wildlife-vehicle collisions, while improving safety and operations for all users.
- 2) Requires Caltrans to include wildlife connectivity assets, including wildlife crossings, improved culverts and bridges, habitat corridors, and fencing, in the TAMP to guide selection of projects for the State Highway Operation and Protection Program (SHOPP).
- 3) Requires Caltrans to develop targets and performance measures in the TAMP for wildlife connectivity assets that reflect the need for new assets and the condition of existing assets that improve or maintain wildlife crossings on the SHS.
- 4) Requires Caltrans review the full extent of the state highway system in consultation CDFW to develop a comprehensive approach to address wildlife connectivity needs throughout the state.
- 5) Elevates CDFW from a consultative role to a joint role with Caltrans in developing a biennial inventory of connectivity needs on the state highway system where the implementation of wildlife passage could reduce wildlife-vehicle collisions or enhance wildlife connectivity.
- 6) Requires Caltrans, in a wildlife connectivity report due to the Legislature by July 1, 2028, to include the joint inventory of wildlife connectivity needs and total funding by fund source for these improvements since September 30, 2022.

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) 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 to fund major capital improvements to preserve and protect the state highway system (Streets and Highways Code (SHC) §14526.4).

- 2) Requires Caltrans, every two years, to prepare a State Highway System Management Plan to implement the SHOPP and must identify rehabilitation or reconstruction needs of all state highways and bridges over a 10-year period and include quantifiable accomplishments, goals, objectives, costs, and performance measures, including for pedestrian and bicycle facilities (SHC §164.6).
- 3) Defines “connectivity area” as an area identified by any federal or state agency that meets the needs for a special status species, an area identified by CDFW as important for ecological connectivity for fish or wildlife or an area identified by Caltrans with known or potential transportation barriers to wildlife connectivity (SHC §158).
- 4) 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 (SHC §158).
- 5) Declares the intent of the Legislature that Caltrans review the full extent of the state highway system in consultation with the CDFW 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 (SHC §158.1).
- 6) Requires Caltrans, in consultation with CDFW, by July 1, 2024, 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, at a minimum, on a biennial basis. Caltrans must consider the following factors, among others:
 - a) The ability of wildlife passage features to enhance connectivity and permeability within a connectivity area.
 - b) The cost-effectiveness of implementing wildlife passage features through associated transportation projects and ability of wildlife passage features to facilitate continued functional wildlife movement or improved public safety outcomes.
 - c) Whether a wildlife passage feature would substantially decrease the likelihood of collisions between wildlife and vehicles and contribute to the survival or recovery of any species (SHC §158.1).
- 7) In collaboration with CDFW and prior to project design and implementation, requires Caltrans, on or after July 1, 2025, to assess wildlife connectivity barriers of any project on the state highway system located in a connectivity area that adds a traffic lane or that has the potential to significantly impair wildlife connectivity (SHC §158.2).
- 8) On or before July 1, 2025, requires Caltrans to update appropriate design guidance, including the Highway Design Manual, to incorporate design concepts for wildlife passage features and related standard plans and specifications (SHC §158.3).

- 9) Creates the Transportation Wildlife Connectivity Remediation Program within Caltrans to fund, upon appropriations by the Legislature, wildlife connectivity projects identified in the above inventory (SHC §158.4).

FISCAL EFFECT: According to the Senate Appropriations Committee, 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; costs to CDFW and CTC would be absorbable.

COMMENTS: *According to the author, "California's highways connect our communities and carry millions of drivers safely to work, school, and home every day. But too often, those same roadways become places where drivers encounter animals in the roadway with little warning, creating dangerous situations that can lead to serious crashes, injuries, and costly damage. We know these collisions are preventable. At the same time, roadway barriers severely restrict animal movement...Wildlife crossings and related infrastructure have been shown to dramatically reduce collisions between vehicles and animals, yet too often these solutions are treated as stand-alone projects rather than incorporated into routine highway planning. SB 1250 makes clear that improving roadway safety means planning ahead by using the same data, engineering, and investment strategies we apply to other highway risks to identify collision hotspots and address them as part of how we build and maintain California's transportation system."*

The state highway system has created wildlife barriers. According to CDFW, "Habitat connectivity is critical for maintaining viable populations of wildlife species, particularly in the face of anthropogenic pressures and a changing climate. Barriers created by linear infrastructure such as roads, railways, and canals can influence wildlife movement, impede genetic exchange among populations, cause direct mortality, and ultimately reduce resilience of populations."

As stated in Caltrans' 2024 Wildlife Connectivity Program Report, the first inventory of wildlife barriers on the SHS required by existing law, "Caltrans is one of the largest landowners in California, managing approximately 15,181 miles of SHS Infrastructure, including roadways, railways, canals, walls, fencing, and other human made features bisect high quality habitat, creating barriers for over 180 threatened or endangered species...Habitat loss through landscape fragmentation and development have led to isolated species populations and reduced genetic dispersal. Improving connectivity to fragmented habitats will aid in the resilience of terrestrial and aquatic species to drought, wildfire, and other climate change stressors, and further reduce animal/vehicle collisions. As lanes have been added and traffic has increased, animal/vehicle roadkill rates have also increased." In this report, Caltrans identified 31 active or funded remediation projects, 37 in the planning stage, and 76 in need of funding (of this total, over half overlap with CDFW priorities mentioned below).

Based on three statewide assessments, the latest in 2024, CDFW identified 204 "segments of linear infrastructure" mostly associated with the SHS, totaling just over 3,000 miles that results in barriers to wildlife movement. (This amount does not include barriers to fish species, which this bill does not address). Of this total, 60 segments totaling 664 miles are "priority segments" constituting the highest priority for remediation in each of the six CDFW regions, and 12 segments totaling 313 miles are "top statewide priorities". Top priority barriers include US 395 in Lassen County, SR-17 in Santa Cruz County, SR-58 in Kern County, I-15 in San Diego and

Riverside Counties, and US-395 in Mono County that impact species such as deer, elk, bighorn sheep, bear, wolf, coyote, and reptiles; 10 of the 12 top priority barriers impact mountain lions.

Species attempting to cross a barrier can result in wildlife-vehicle collisions, risking public safety and causing animal fatalities. According to the California Highway Patrol, between 2021 and 2025, 10,633 wildlife-vehicle collisions (over 2,100/year) have been reported resulting in 19 fatalities and 1,966 injuries to drivers or passengers. In a 2024 report, the UC Davis Road Ecology Center estimates that vehicles kill more than 48,000 mule deer (twice as many than from hunting), close to 100 mountain lions, and thousands of other animals annually on the state's roads.

Should wildlife crossings be considered a traditional transportation asset? This bill requires Caltrans to include within the TAMP infrastructure such as bridges or culverts that facilitate wildlife passage or fencing that prevents passage into state highways.

A TAMP is a federally required plan that is essentially a long-term maintenance and investment strategy for the roads and bridges within both the national highway system (NHS) and SHS. Congress first required states to develop TAMPs in 2018 and update them every four years. The TAMP maps out when and how to maintain existing infrastructure proactively, stretching every dollar as far as possible. Over a 10-year horizon, the TAMP details management of the full life cycle of transportation assets—principally pavement and bridges—to minimize costs, manage risks, measure performance gaps, and identify funding and actions to close them.

For example, Caltrans annually collects data on the condition of pavement for every 1/10th of a mile on the NHS and SHS. It then assigns a baseline condition (e.g., good, fair, poor) and a desired condition over a 10-year period (e.g., 60% in good condition). Using models to estimate pavement deterioration rates and other technical data, Caltrans forecasts pavement conditions over 10 years and types and costs of treatment or maintenance (e.g., coatings, grinding, asphalt overlay) over time that can best achieve and prolong desired pavement conditions. Finally, Caltrans identifies available funding and investment strategies to meet this condition and any projected gaps in funding.

It is unclear how a wildlife crossing or fencing, some of which would likely constitute new construction and thus not appropriate for the TAMP, can reasonably and logically fit into the above TAMP planning process. Such features, however worthy, serve a non-transportation purpose and thus may not be compatible with traditional transportation planning, modelling or analysis.

Including connectivity assets in the TAMP requires Caltrans to inventory and measure their performance, however this does not require them to get built, especially since federal penalties typically only apply to pavement and bridge performance. The TAMP provides a framework for understanding asset performance gaps and prioritizing actions to address those gaps, but it is not a binding construction commitment. Federal oversight focuses on the consistency of a state's TAMP with federal planning or analytical requirements for pavement and bridges. However, inclusion of all other assets is discretionary and has no bearing on whether specific projects get built.

State Highway System Management Plan (SHSMP) already includes wildlife connectivity. In addition to the TAMP, state law requires Caltrans to prepare what is essentially an equivalent 10-year plan for the SHS. The SHSMP overlaps and addresses most federal TAMP requirements,

but goes beyond the TAMP by including assets for the entire SHOPP, the Highway Maintenance program, transit priority facilities and specific projects in each Caltrans district intended to meet various performance targets. Due to its specificity, the SHSMP appears to be the more relevant planning document to identify specific wildlife connectivity projects for funding rather than the TAMP.

The 2025 draft SHSMP includes fish and wildlife connectivity assets, including related performance metrics, targets and remedial measures. As of September 2024, Caltrans has inventoried 89 priority barriers caused by culverts and bridges that impede movement of threatened or endangered wildlife—of these, seven are in the project planning stage and one has yet to be programmed. Caltrans states that once barriers become “targets” in the SHSMP, it takes about two years to develop project scope, cost and scheduling information and receive SHOPP funding.

Given a lack of dedicated funding for remediation and the significant demand for SHOPP funds only a handful of wildlife remediation projects have been completed to date. Once a barrier has been identified, Caltrans states that it takes two to three years to conduct field assessments, assess species impacts, and develop appropriate engineering and remediation plans. As stated in the 2025 SHSMP, over the next 5-10 years, these assessments are anticipated to identify several hundred wildlife barriers. In response to AB 2344 (Friedman), Chapter 964, Statutes of 2022, the Legislature appropriated funding in the 2023-24 budget for Caltrans to begin the above assessment work and in October 2024, Caltrans kicked off a partnership with the California Conservation Corp to characterize barriers and gather field data and other information on over 10,000 miles of the SHS, some of which overlaps with CDFW priorities segments, to be used by biologists to develop priorities and assess data gaps.

This fall, Caltrans plans to convene a Wildlife Passage Advisory Committees (WildPAC), which will enhance coordination between Caltrans, CDFW and other stakeholders with the goal of vetting priority barriers facilitated by the input of wildlife experts and land managers.

However, the Legislature has yet to appropriate funding to fully implement AB 2344, which requires Caltrans to develop a more systematic approach to remediate barriers. Currently, Caltrans remediates barriers opportunistically if there is a nexus with a maintenance planned project; for example, a culvert causing a wildlife barrier can be upsized if it already scheduled to be replaced. Caltrans also remediates barriers as mitigation if required by a permit or regulation.

In support of this bill, a coalition of environmental organizations write: “California’s roads fragment habitat and create dangerous conditions for people and wildlife. Wildlife crossings are not being planned for and implemented at a sufficient level because they are not treated as core transportation infrastructure. Caltrans does not systematically integrate wildlife connectivity into its asset management system, so crossings are often handled as stand-alone conservation projects instead of being built alongside routine highway upgrades. SB 1250 addresses long-recognized gaps by: (1) establishing wildlife connectivity as a formal performance objective within the asset management system; (2) requiring clear connectivity targets in the TAMP; and (3) clarifying a collaborative, transparent process for public input and interagency coordination to develop Caltrans’ inventory of connectivity needs.”

Related legislation. AB 2344 (Friedman), Chapter 964, Statutes of 2022 requires Caltrans, in consultation with CDFW, by July 1, 2024, 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.

SB 960 (Wiener), Chapter 630, Statutes of 2024 requires Caltrans to include “complete streets” assets in the TAMP and SHSMP and develop associated targets and performance measures.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

350 Bay Area Action
350 Sacramento
Active San Gabriel Valley
Alameda County Resource Conservation District
All Hands Ecology
Alta Peak Chapter, California Native Plant Society
American River Conservancy
Animal Legal Defense Fund
Arc Solutions
Arroyos & Foothills Conservancy
Better World Group
Bolsa Chica Land Trust
Cactus To Cloud Institute
California Council of Land Trusts
California Environmental Voters
California Habitat Conservation Planning Coalition
California Native Plant Society, Mojave Desert Chapter
California Waterfowl Association
CalWild
Center for Biological Diversity
Center for Environmental Health
Central Valley Partnership
Citizens for Los Angeles Wildlife
Cleaneearth4kids.org
Climate Action California
Climate Plan
Coastal Environmental Rights Foundation
Coastal Policy Solutions
Coastal Ranches Conservancy
Consejo De Federaciones Mexicanas
County of Santa Clara
Defenders of Wildlife
El Dorado County Transportation Commission
Endangered Habitats League
Environment California
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
Laguna Greenbelt
Land Trust of Santa Cruz County
Los Cerritos Wetlands Land Trust
Los Padres Forest Watch
Marin Conservation League
Mid-Peninsula Regional Open Space District
Morongo Basin Conservation Association
Mount Shasta Bioregional Ecology Center
National Wildlife Federation
Oswit Land Trust
Pathways for Wildlife
Paula Lane Action Network
Peninsula Open Space Trust
Pew Charitable Trusts
Planning and Conservation League
Plumas Audubon Society
Preserve Calavera
Rails to Trails Conservancy
Resource Renewal Institute
San Diego Bird Alliance
San Diego Humane Society - Project Wildlife
San Francisco Bay Physicians for Social Responsibility
San Francisco Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals
San Diego350
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 Consortium
Sierra Nevada Alliance
Siskiyou Land Trust
Social Compassion in Legislation
Solano Land Trust
Sonoma Ecology Center

Sonoma Land Trust
South Yuba River Citizens League
Streets for All
Sugar Pine Foundation
Sustainable Conservation
Temecula-Elsinore-Anza-Murrieta Resource Conservation District
The Climate Center
The Nature Conservancy
The Volgenau Foundation
The Wilderness Society
TreePeople
Trust for Public Land
Ventura Land Trust
Wildcoast
Wildlands Network
Wildlife Conservation Network
Zerow.org
Two Individuals

Opposition

None on file

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