

Date of Hearing: June 30, 2026

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON WATER, PARKS, AND WILDLIFE

Diane Papan, Chair

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

SENATE VOTE: 37-0

SUBJECT: State highway system: wildlife connectivity

SUMMARY: Requires the Department of Transportation (Caltrans) to include wildlife connectivity assets in the Transportation Asset Management Plan (TAMP) and work jointly with the Department of Fish and Wildlife (DFW) to develop an inventory of wildlife connectivity needs. Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Requires Caltrans to include wildlife connectivity assets, including wildlife crossings, improved culverts and bridges, habitat corridors, and fencing to guide animals to crossings, in TAMP.
- 2) Requires the California Transportation Commission (CTC), in connection with TAMP, to adopt targets and performance metrics for wildlife connectivity assets that improve or maintain the connectivity of wildlife crossings on the state highway system.
- 3) Defines “wildlife connectivity asset” for the purposes of this bill as 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.
- 4) Provides that nothing in this bill shall require developer fees to fund local road improvements whose sole purpose is wildlife passage across transportation infrastructure.
- 5) Requires Caltrans and DFW to jointly 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.
- 6) Requires Caltrans and DFW to jointly update the inventory of wildlife connectivity needs at least every two years.
- 7) Requires Caltrans’ report to the Legislature regarding progress in developing the inventory of wildlife connectivity needs to include a list of wildlife connectivity improvements and amount of funding spent on those improvements since September 30, 2022.
- 8) Makes technical and conforming changes.

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) Requires Caltrans, in consultation with DFW and other appropriate agencies, to establish an inventory of wildlife connectivity needs on the state highway system. Requires Caltrans to publish the completed inventory of wildlife connectivity needs on its internet website by July 1, 2024 and to update the inventory at least every two years thereafter (Streets and Highway Code § 158.1).

- 2) 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 (Streets and Highways Code § 156 *et seq.*).
- 3) Requires Caltrans, in consultation with CTC, to prepare a robust asset management plan (i.e., TAMP) to guide selection of projects for the State Highway Operation and Protection Program (SHOPP). TAMP shall be consistent with applicable state and federal requirements and include complete street assets (Government Code § 14526.4).
- 4) Requires CTC to adopt targets and performance measures reflecting state transportation goals and objectives in connection with TAMP and to review and approve TAMP [Government Code § 14526.4(c)].
- 5) Defines “asset management plan” as a document assessing the health and condition of the state highway system with which Caltrans is able to determine the most effective way to apply the state’s limited resources [Government Code § 14526.4(d)].
- 6) Requires DFW 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 (Fish and Game Code § 1930.5).

FISCAL EFFECT: Unknown. This bill is keyed fiscal.

COMMENTS:

- 1) **Purpose of this bill.** 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. [This bill] 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.

- 2) **Background.** Habitat connectivity is critical for maintaining viable populations of wildlife species, particularly in the face of anthropogenic pressures and a changing climate. Intact biological corridors help maintain healthy populations of plants and animals by allowing genetic exchange, species migration, and repopulation following catastrophes. Built infrastructure, including the state’s transportation system (highways, local roads, and rail) can limit habitat connectivity and can influence wildlife movement, impede genetic exchange among populations, cause direct mortality, and ultimately reduce resilience of wildlife

populations. To improve habitat connectivity, built infrastructure such as wildlife crossings can provide animals an alternate route to cross busy roads. A crossing is typically an overpass or an underpass that allows animals to safely cross from one side of a road to the other. The transportation system can also impose barriers to fish passage (such as culverts that carry a stream under a road) by preventing aquatic species from reaching upstream habitat where they breed and grow. Increasing the size of culverts can return upstream access for fish species. Culverts, when sized correctly, can also be utilized by terrestrial species. Wildlife crossings can benefit fish and wildlife as well as improve traffic safety by preventing wildlife-vehicle collisions.

DFW efforts on wildlife connectivity. DFW established a connectivity team following the passage of AB 2344 (Friedman). The connectivity team includes permanent staff working exclusively to improve wildlife connectivity across California. This team includes a senior scientist at headquarters and in each of DFW's six terrestrial regions, and an engineer specializing in wildlife crossing infrastructure. The connectivity team assists Caltrans with developing the Terrestrial Wildlife Connectivity Barriers Dataset, provides technical advice regarding wildlife connectivity to Caltrans, and works to advance connectivity science in California. These barrier segments comprise a total of 4,914.7 kilometers of linear infrastructure. Many of the known barriers are associated with the State Highway System, but railroads, canals, dams, high-speed rail alignments, border walls, and local roads are also represented. The Connectivity Barriers Dataset and work of the connectivity team build on DFW's previous work on wildlife connectivity, including their assessment in 2022 in a report entitled *Restoring California's Wildlife Connectivity 2022*.

Caltrans efforts on wildlife connectivity. Caltrans created a new office of Fish and Wildlife Connectivity (FWC) in July 2023. The establishment of FWC built on several years of work on wildlife connectivity, including collaboration with DFW to publish *California Essential Habitat Connectivity Project: A Strategy for Conserving a Connected California* (CEHC) in February 2010. CEHC along with DFW's 2022 report, *Restoring California's Wildlife Connectivity 2022*, has informed Caltrans' planning and implementation of several wildlife connectivity projects.

To comply with AB 2344 (Friedman), Caltrans released its first *Wildlife Connectivity Program Report* in July 2024 that provides a baseline inventory of wildlife connectivity barriers on the State Highway System. Per the report, "locations included in this inventory were identified by Caltrans districts and partners in consideration of current wildlife connectivity barrier remediation efforts and priorities within respective district areas. Consultation with key stakeholders, including CDFW, relied primarily on coordination that pre-dated [AB 2344]." The 2024 report states that: Caltrans and partners are currently developing 31 active (funded) wildlife connectivity remediation locations (15 of which are within DFW priority route segments); Caltrans is planning wildlife connectivity barrier projects at 37 locations (22 of which are in DFW priority route segments); and Caltrans has identified 76 priority wildlife connectivity barrier locations that require funding (42 of which are in DFW priority route segments).

TAMP. TAMP is a coordinated plan by Caltrans and its partner agencies to maintain California's transportation infrastructure assets today and into the future. TAMP is required by federal law and intended to evolve over time as changes in condition, budget, risks, constraints, and strategic priorities are identified. According to federal regulations (23 Code

of Federal Regulations § 515.13), TAMP must be updated every four years to incorporate improvements and re-evaluate conditions, targets and performance. It provides a framework for understanding performance gaps, prioritizing actions to address the gaps, and establishing business processes that streamline asset management activities.

SHOPP. SHOPP is a four-year document of projects that is adopted by CTC after holding at least two public hearings and a finding of consistency with TAMP. The adopted SHOPP is submitted to the Legislature and the Governor not later than April 1 of each even-numbered year. SHOPP projects are identified through periodic condition assessments and field reviews, through the biennial State Highway System Management Plan, are guided by the developing TAMP, and constrained to the funding in the adopted Fund Estimate. Funding for SHOPP projects is a mixture of Federal and State funds, including the Road Maintenance and Rehabilitation Account created by SB 1. Projects included in the program are limited to capital improvements relative to the maintenance, safety, operation, and rehabilitation of the state highway system that do not add new capacity to the system.

- 3) **Arguments in support.** The Nature Conservancy (TNC) is the sponsor of this bill and asserts that it will better integrate wildlife connectivity into California's transportation planning. TNC argues California needs to do a better job on wildlife connectivity because "our highways fragment habitat and cause tens of thousands of wildlife-vehicle collisions annually, costing Californians well over \$200 million each year and posing serious risks to drivers. Many species are increasingly isolated by roadway barriers, a challenge underscored by the February 2026 listing of Southern California and Central Coast Mountain Lions as threatened under the California Endangered Species Act due to habitat loss, fragmentation, and genetic isolation." TNC contends this bill will ensure public safety and wildlife movement.
- 4) **Double referral.** This bill was also referred to the Assembly Transportation Committee where is passed by a vote of 11-4 on June 22, 2026.
- 5) **Related legislation.** 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.

AB 2320 (Irwin) of 2024 would have declared that it is the state's policy to increase connectivity between habitat areas in order to protect wildlife and requires the annual 30x30 report to outline progress in protecting wildlife corridors. AB 2320 was held in the Senate Committee on Appropriations.

AB 2558 (Hart) of 2024 would have expanded an existing prohibition on constructing impediments to fish passage so that it applies statewide instead of only to certain regions. Would have required Caltrans to complete a programmatic environmental review of fish passage barriers by January 1, 2026. AB 2558 was held in the Assembly Appropriations Committee.

AB 2344 (Friedman), Chapter 964, Statutes of 2022, requires Caltrans, in consultation with DFW 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, authorizes 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.

AB 1189 (Bloom) of 2021 would have prohibited Caltrans from charging for administration indirect cost recovery for any wildlife crossing project that receives private funding for more than 50% of the project cost. AB 1189 was never set for hearing in the Assembly Transportation Committee.

SB 1372 (Monning) of 2020 would have instituted structural reforms at DFW and Caltrans to facilitate wildlife corridors, among other things. SB 1372 was not moved by the author due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

SB 1 (Beall), Chapter 5, Statutes of 2017, increases several taxes and fees to raise roughly \$5.2 billion in new transportation revenues annually and establishes the Advance Mitigation Program at Caltrans, among other provisions.

AB 2785 (Ruskin), Chapter 333, Statutes of 2008, requires DFW to investigate, study, and identify those areas in the state that are most essential as wildlife corridors and maintain a spatial data system that maps those areas.

SB 857 (Kuehl), Chapter 589, Statutes of 2005, requires Caltrans to prepare an annual report to the Legislature describing the status of Caltrans' progress in locating, assessing, and remediating barriers to fish passage, as defined. SB 857 requires Caltrans to also complete assessments of potential barriers to anadromous fish prior to commencing any project using state or federal transportation funds.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

The Nature Conservancy (sponsor)
350 Bay Area Action
350 Sacramento
Active San Gabriel Valley
Alameda County Resource 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 Council of Land Trusts
California Environmental Voters
California Habitat Conservation Planning Coalition
California Native Plant Society, Alta Peak Chapter
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
CleanEarth4kids.org
Climate Action California
ClimatePlan
Coastal Environmental Rights Foundation
Coastal Policy Solutions
Coastal Ranches Conservancy
Consejo de Federaciones Mexicanas
Defenders of Wildlife
El Dorado County Transportation Commission
Endangered Habitats League
Environment California
Environmental Protection Information Center
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, Inc.
Land Trust of Santa Cruz County
Los Cerritos Wetlands Land Trust
Los Padres Forest Watch
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
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 Diego Zoo Wildlife Alliance
San Francisco Bay Physicians for Social Responsibility
San Francisco Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals
SanDiego350
Santa Clara Valley Habitat Agency
Santa Clara Valley Open Space Authority
Save Mount Diablo
SC Wildlands
Sea and Sage Audubon Society
Sequoia Riverlands Trust
Shasta Land Trust
Sierra Club California
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 Volgenau Foundation
The Wilderness Society
Treepeople
Trust for Public Land
Ventura Land Trust
WILDCOAST
Wildlands Network
Wildlife Conservation Network
ZeroW.org

Opposition

None on file

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