
SENATE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Senator Sabrina Cervantes, Chair
2025 - 2026 Regular Session

SB 1334 (Alvarado-Gil) - Route 59: adoption

Version: April 6, 2026

Urgency: No

Hearing Date: April 27, 2026

Policy Vote: TRANS. 12 - 0

Mandate: No

Consultant: Mark McKenzie

Bill Summary: SB 1334 would require the California Transportation Commission (CTC) to reach an agreement with Merced, Stanislaus, and Tuolumne Counties for the acquisition and adoption of County Road J59 into the state highway system as part of State Route (SR) 59 by December 31, 2030, as specified.

Fiscal Impact:

- The CTC would incur unknown costs, potentially up to \$150,000 annually for four years, to negotiate with the specified counties to establish terms and conditions for the transfer of ownership of County Road J59 to the state prior to December 31, 2030. (State Highway Account and Public Transportation Account)
- The Department of Transportation (Caltrans) would incur unknown major one-time and ongoing costs, likely in the hundreds of millions of dollars, to upgrade County Road J59 to meet state highway standards before 2031, and to conduct long-term ongoing repair and maintenance on the roadway and bridges. See Staff Comments. (State Highway Account, Road Maintenance and Repair Account [RMRA], federal funds)
- Unknown major cost pressures to the extent that initial and ongoing costs to adopt county road J59 as part of SR 59 and maintain the roadway on a long-term basis would displace expenditures on other planned infrastructure and maintenance projects on the state highway system. (General Fund, State Highway Account, RMRA, federal funds)

Background: Existing law authorizes the CTC to select, adopt, and determine the location for state highways on routes authorized by law. Existing law requires the CTC to adopt a traversable highway as a state highway whenever such a road exists between the termini of, and approximately on, any route included in the state highway system, except as provided. The CTC may adopt any such road if it determines that it is constructed to adequate standards and is contiguous to an existing portion of the state highway system presently maintained by Caltrans.

Existing law describes the routes that are included in the state highway system, including SR 59 which is defined as being from SR 152 northerly to SR 99 near Merced, and from SR 99 to Snelling.

County Road J59, also known as La Grange Road, is a north-south county highway in the foothills on the western slope of the Sierra Nevada Mountains in Merced, Stanislaus, and Tuolumne Counties. Its southern terminus is a continuation of SR 59

north of Snelling, and it travels approximately 27 miles, crossing SR 132 before reaching its northern terminus where it connects to an interchange with SRs 108 and 120. Despite its designation as a county road, J59 primarily serves as an interregional connector route, which must be maintained by Merced, Stanislaus, and Tuolumne Counties. In January 2010, the Tuolumne County Board of Supervisors made a formal request to the state to add the entire length of County Route J59 as a northerly extension of SR 59 from its terminus in Snelling, Merced County, to the intersection of SRs 108 and 120 in Tuolumne County. As noted in the Related Legislation section below, there have been two previous attempts to facilitate the adoption of some or all of County Road J59 into the state highway system.

Proposed Law: SB 1334 would require the CTC to reach an agreement with Merced, Stanislaus, and Tuolumne Counties by December 31, 2030 for the acquisition and adoption of County Road J59 from its intersection with junction of SRs 108 and 120 to its intersection with SR 59. The terms of the acquisition must include all of the following:

- The acquisition must occur on or before December 31, 2030.
- Repairs for road damage as proposed by the Counties of Merced Stanislaus, and Tuolumne.
- The road must be adopted into the state highway system as part of SR 59.
- The Counties of Merced, Stanislaus, and Tuolumne must not be required to upgrade County Road J59 to meet state highway standards before the road is adopted as part of SR 59.

The bill would also revise the statutory description of SR 59, as of January 1, 2031, as being from SR 152 northerly to SR 99 near Merced, and from SR 99 near Merced to the junction of SRs 108 and 120 (rather than the current terminus at Snelling).

Related Legislation: AB 464 (Olsen), which was held on the Assembly Appropriations Committee's Suspense File in 2011, would have added 15 miles of County Road J59 in Stanislaus and Tuolumne Counties (from SR 132 to the interchange with SRs 108 and 120) to the state highway system as part of SR 59, as specified.

AB 2462 (Gray), which was referred to the Assembly Transportation Committee in 2020 but never heard, would have redefined SR 59 as being from SR 152 northerly to SR 99 near Merced, and from that point to SR 120.

Staff Comments: Caltrans anticipates unknown significant one-time and ongoing costs to adopt County Road J59 into the state highway system, requiring a shift in resources from other planned infrastructure projects that will delay those projects that are currently programmed and also create ongoing maintenance needs that will need to be balanced with other projects in the future.

Caltrans currently lacks pavement condition records, treatment history, traffic loading data, and drainage assessments for the 26.8 mile corridor of County Road J59 that also includes seven bridges, which prevents preparation of a precise cost estimate. Staff notes that legislative analyses of AB 464 (Olsen, 2011), which proposed to transfer approximately 15 miles of the roadway to the state, provided examples of deficiencies that would require upgrades to state highway standards, including: (1) much of the

roadway has no shoulders, or has less than two-foot wide shoulders, with steep drop offs; (2) inadequate shoulders create inadequate recovery zones that prevent errant drivers from having room to safely correct their vehicles; and (3) the roadway has other non-standard features, such as slopes, drains, signs, guard rails, and horizontal curves, as well as bridge structures that may not be adequate for a state highway. Caltrans estimates that up-front costs to bring the entirety of the roadway and bridges to state highway standards could be in the hundreds of millions of dollars. Caltrans further notes that ongoing maintenance costs, including periodic infrastructure rehabilitation and replacement costs, could also be in the hundreds of millions of dollars (net present value) over the next 50 years.

Staff notes that conducting a thorough assessment of the corridor, and budgeting and completing necessary work in advance of adopting County Road J59 into the state highway system by 2031 is not likely to be feasible. In addition, the bill would result in the displacement of other necessary and critical infrastructure and maintenance work that is currently planned and programmed, which creates significant cost pressures on transportation funds.

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