
SENATE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Senator Sabrina Cervantes, Chair
2025 - 2026 Regular Session

SB 1382 (Alvarado-Gil) - Department of Transportation: mountain passes: openings

Version: April 6, 2026

Urgency: No

Hearing Date: April 27, 2026

Policy Vote: TRANS. 12 - 0

Mandate: No

Consultant: Mark McKenzie

Bill Summary: SB 1382 would require the Department of Transportation (Caltrans) to notify an affected local official of the proposed schedule for opening a mountain pass by April 1 of each year. The bill would also require Caltrans to develop a public outreach plan to inform the public about the closing and opening of mountain passes, and to publish that information on its website.

Fiscal Impact:

- Caltrans estimates annual ongoing costs of approximately \$417,000 in staff time and workload across several Caltrans districts for external engagement with local officials and the public about mountain pass closures and potential opening dates, as well as the development of outreach plans by district staff that must also be reviewed by Caltrans headquarters. Costs to publish outreach plans on the Caltrans website would be absorbable. (State Highway Account)

Background: As part of California's state highway system, Caltrans manages highways that traverse the Sierra Nevada Mountains. Three of these highways include mountain passes in the Central Sierras that are closed with physical gates during winter and reopened in the spring. These passes, which are located in Caltrans District 10, are Ebbetts Pass on State Route (SR) 4 in Alpine County, Monitor Pass on SR 89 also in Alpine County, and Sonora Pass on SR 108 in Tuolumne County. Additionally, Tioga Pass on SR 120 in Mariposa County, which is the highest mountain pass in California at 9,943 feet, is also closed during the winter months. The Tioga Pass is located primarily within Yosemite National Park, so the gates are managed by the National Park Service. The portion of SR 120 that is west of the eastern gate to Yosemite is also often closed in winter from Tioga Pass to five miles west of Lee Vining in Caltrans District 9. Caltrans also closes portions of other state highways, primarily in District 3, during winter months.

Although the locations for winter closures generally remain the same from year to year, the effort and time necessary for mountain pass openings can vary greatly. The major factors that affect the timing of opening passes are the amount of accumulated snow, the frequency and duration of late season spring storms, springtime temperatures, and winter damage to the roadways. Caltrans also considers public and worker safety, public and economic interests, and weather conditions when determining the closing and opening dates from year to year. Maintenance crews typically begin removing snow from the roadway on the first Monday of April each year, working seven days per week if conditions allow it, until each pass is free of snow and any roadway hazards. Once all snow is cleared, maintenance crews assess the roadway for possible damage,

including signage and guardrails that may need to be replaced, before Caltrans can declare mountain passes are officially open for the spring and summer months.

Caltrans indicates that they use several methods of communicating information to local officials and the public about weather conditions on the Sierra roadways, including the closure and opening of mountain passes. For up-to-the minute updates, Caltrans maintains a website and app for mobile devices called QuickMap. In addition, district staff send out notices to local officials and traffic advisories to local news outlets, and also post information on social media with estimates of mountain pass opening dates.

Proposed Law: AB 1382 would require Caltrans, by April 1 of each year and to the extent feasible, to notify an affected local official of the department's proposed schedule for opening a mountain pass. This bill would also require Caltrans to develop a public outreach plan to inform the public about the closing and opening of a mountain pass, including publishing that information on its website. For purposes of this bill, "mountain pass" is defined as a state highway that has a physical gate that is used to close the state highway to through traffic during winter months or an emergency.

Staff Comments: This bill is intended to improve coordination between Caltrans and local government officials in rural communities to ensure more consistent public communication regarding the timing of mountain pass closures and openings, which would help rural residents, businesses and visitors better plan for seasonal access while maintaining necessary flexibility for safety considerations. Caltrans indicates that it would incur ongoing workload costs, the equivalent of approximately 3.0 PY of staff time across several districts, to develop public outreach plans for each affected mountain pass, conduct outreach with local officials on both ends of passes that are closed in winter months, and respond to inquiries from members of the public about closures and potential opening dates each year.

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