
UNFINISHED BUSINESS

Bill No: SB 720
Author: Ashby (D), et al.
Amended: 9/4/25 in Assembly
Vote: 21

SENATE TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE: 12-0, 4/8/25

AYES: Strickland, Archuleta, Arreguín, Blakespear, Cervantes, Dahle, Gonzalez, Grayson, Limón, Menjivar, Richardson, Umberg

NO VOTE RECORDED: Cortese, Seyarto, Valladares

SENATE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE: 13-0, 4/29/25

AYES: Umberg, Niello, Allen, Arreguín, Ashby, Caballero, Durazo, Laird, Stern, Valladares, Wahab, Weber Pierson, Wiener

SENATE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE: 4-2, 5/23/25

AYES: Caballero, Cabaldon, Grayson, Richardson

NOES: Seyarto, Wahab

NO VOTE RECORDED: Dahle

SENATE FLOOR: 31-3, 6/3/25

AYES: Allen, Archuleta, Arreguín, Ashby, Becker, Blakespear, Cabaldon, Caballero, Cervantes, Choi, Dahle, Durazo, Gonzalez, Grayson, Laird, Limón, McGuire, McNerney, Menjivar, Niello, Padilla, Pérez, Richardson, Rubio, Smallwood-Cuevas, Stern, Strickland, Umberg, Valladares, Weber Pierson, Wiener

NOES: Alvarado-Gil, Jones, Seyarto

NO VOTE RECORDED: Cortese, Grove, Hurtado, Ochoa Bogh, Reyes, Wahab

ASSEMBLY FLOOR: 56-6, 9/12/25 – Roll call not available.

SUBJECT: Automated traffic enforcement system programs

SOURCE: Sacramento Area Bicycle Advocates
Streets are For Everyone
Streets for All

DIGEST: This bill establishes an alternative automated traffic enforcement program for local governments to enforce red light violations.

Assembly Amendments of 9/4/25 require video evidence of the violation, add privacy protections related to photographs and video recordings, add provisions ensuring automated enforcement systems are only placed in intersections with a yellow light change interval in accordance with the California Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (CA MUTCD), create a tiered penalty schedule with increased fines for each subsequent red light offense within a three year period, provide that a person shall not be assessed a civil penalty if they are subject to criminal penalties for the same act, require local jurisdictions to develop guidelines related to violations for right turns on red, and make other technical and clarifying changes.

ANALYSIS:

Existing law:

- 1) Authorizes the use of automated traffic enforcement systems (i.e., red light cameras) at railroad crossings and intersections to record violations of unlawful grade crossings and running of red lights. (Vehicle Code (VEH) 21455.5)
- 2) Conditions the use of red light cameras on several requirements and procedures, including the following:
 - a) Only a governmental agency in cooperation with a law enforcement agency may operate a system.
 - b) Intersections equipped with the enforcement systems must be identified by signs visible to traffic in all directions or by signs posted at all major entrances to the participating city.
 - c) The city council or county board of supervisors must conduct a public hearing on the proposed use of an automated enforcement system.
 - d) The governmental agency that proposes to install or operate an automated traffic enforcement system may not consider revenue generation, beyond recovering its actual costs of operating the system, as a factor when considering whether or not to install or operate a system within its local jurisdiction.

- e) Use of the system must be preceded by public notice by the local jurisdiction at least 30 days in advance, and only warning notices may be issued to violators during the first 30 days of the system's operation, after which citations may be issued.
 - f) All photographic records are confidential and shall be made available only to the affected governmental agencies for enforcement purposes.
 - g) Requires a peace officer or "qualified employee" of a law enforcement agency to review the photograph taken by an automated traffic enforcement system and issue a citation, as appropriate.
 - h) Any driver alleged to be a violator of the red light provisions or the vehicle's registered owner is permitted to review the photographic evidence of the alleged violation.
- 3) Requires a manufacturer or supplier that operates an automated traffic enforcement system, in cooperation with the governmental agency to submit an annual report to the Judicial Council that includes, the number of alleged violations captured by the system, the number of citations issued by a law enforcement agency based on information collected from the system, the types of violations, the number and percentage of citations that are dismissed by the court, and the number of traffic collisions at each intersection that occurred prior to, and after the installation of, the automated traffic enforcement system. (VEH 21455.5)

This bill:

- 1) Authorizes local jurisdictions to use an alternative automated camera program to enforce red light violations.
- 2) Requires that a violation recorded by the automated traffic enforcement system to be subject only to a civil penalty, and that the violation not result in the Department of Motor Vehicles suspending or revoking the privilege of a violator to drive a motor vehicle or in a violation point being assessed against the violator.
- 3) Requires automated red light systems to be placed in locations that are geographically and socioeconomically diverse, and at intersections where data indicates there is a heightened safety risk that warrants additional enforcement

measures. The designated jurisdiction shall describe how it has complied with this provision.

- 4) Requires signage indicating the use of the automated enforcement cameras.
- 5) Prohibits a designated jurisdiction from reducing yellow light interval durations after the placement of the systems.
- 6) Provides for a fine to the registered owner of the vehicle of \$100 for the first offense, \$200 for a second offense, \$350 for a third offense and \$500 for all subsequent offenses. If an individual is indigent, as defined, the individual must be offered community service in lieu of the fine, or the fine is reduced by 80%. The fine is reduced by 50% if the individual makes up to 250% above the federal poverty level.
- 7) Authorizes a late fee of \$50 for the first offense and \$100 for subsequent offenses.
- 8) Provides that the revenue from the fines remain with the cities and shall pay for the installation of the cameras, the adjudication of violations, and construction of traffic calming measures to improve traffic safety. If traffic calming measures aren't deployed within three years the funds revert to the state for use in the Active Transportation Program (ATP).
- 9) Establishes that the photos, videos and administrative records shall be confidential, and that public agencies shall use and allow access to these records only for the purposes of the automated enforcement system. Limits on how long records can be retained are established and disclosures to others prohibited.
- 10) Provides that a person will not be subject to a civil violation if there is proof the vehicle was being used by someone sharing their vehicle in a personal vehicle sharing program or if proof of a copy of a police report indicating the vehicle had been stolen at the time of the violation, in addition to the existing provision for the owner of a rental car.
- 11) Incorporates changes from AB 289 (Haney, 2025) should both bills be enacted.

Comments

- 1) *Purpose of this bill.* According to the author, “Every year, roughly 4,000 people lose their lives to unsafe driving on California streets. SB 720 establishes the Safer Streets Act, which is a critical step towards reducing traffic accidents and fatalities. This bill allows cities to opt in to a new red light camera system in high collision areas. SB 720 changes the violation from a criminal penalty to a civil penalty - easing insurance prices for drivers and creating a more equitable framework in a space historically associated heavily with bias and over criminalization. The Safer Streets Act ensures that revenue generated from the new program funds local safety initiatives, including vital road infrastructure improvements. SB 720 ensures that cities have the tools to create safer streets and to invest in local pedestrian and motorist safety measures.”
- 2) *Current red light cameras.* California has an existing automated red light enforcement program which authorizes local jurisdictions to record red light violations with automated enforcement cameras. This bill does not repeal the current red light camera statute, meaning that local jurisdictions would be authorized to choose which program to utilize should they decide to implement red light cameras. Under the existing program, a violation is issued to the driver of the car, meaning that a photo must be taken of the vehicle’s license plate and the driver. Then, the issuing agency must verify the identity of the person in the photograph. Tickets issued through this program start typically between \$400 - \$500 and assess a point on a driver’s license. A number of local jurisdictions across the state have discontinued their red light camera programs for a variety of reasons, many of which center on infeasibility.
- 3) *Shifting perspective on automated enforcement.* Automated enforcement has recently surged in popularity. Two years ago AB 645 (Friedman, Chapter 808, Statutes of 2023) established a speed safety system program in California and authorized the cities of Los Angeles, San Jose, San Francisco, Oakland, Long Beach, and Glendale to operate a limited number of speed safety systems for five years, or until January 1, 2032, whichever is sooner. SB 1297 (Allen, Chapter 631, Statutes of 2024) expanded the authorization to the City of Malibu along the Pacific Coast Highway. These bills included an array of provisions to address the equity and privacy concerns associated with automated enforcement. Many of these privacy and equity-focused provisions are mirrored in this bill.

- 4) *A new framework for red light camera violations.* In line with provisions within recently chaptered automated speed enforcement legislation, this bill authorizes a city to issue a civil violation instead of a criminal violation from an automated red light camera violation. Furthermore, in contrast to the existing automated red light camera program, the new red light program created through this bill would allow tickets to be issued to the registered owner of the vehicle, instead of the driver. This would eliminate the burdensome driver verification process for operators. While this provision may be appealing to local jurisdictions, it marks a shift from driver responsibility for red light violations to owner responsibility. The lower fine and reduction to an administrative violation (meaning no point would be assessed on a driver's license) may make this provision more palatable for vehicle owners picking up that tab for a red light violation they did not commit. These deviations from the current program mirror the provisions of the speed camera statutes.
- 5) *Fine structure.* This bill generally includes lower fines than the current red light camera violations. Amendments in the Assembly established a tiered penalty schedule with increased fines for each subsequent violation within three years. The penalty is \$100 when no penalty has been assessed in the prior three years, \$200 when there are two violations within three years, \$350 when there are three violations within a three year period, and \$500 for four or more violations within three years. If an individual is indigent, they individual must be offered community service in lieu of the fine, or the fine is reduced by 80%. The fine is reduced by 50% if the individual makes up to 250% above the federal poverty level.

Unlike a traditional criminal ticket, cities will retain all of the revenue from the red light camera ticket. However, cities will only be able to use the tickets to pay for the cost of the program and traffic safety features to make roads safer.

FISCAL EFFECT: Appropriation: No Fiscal Com.: Yes Local: No

According to the Assembly Appropriations Committee:

- 1) The primary fiscal effect, for purposes of this analysis, is in foregone revenue the state would otherwise receive for criminal runnings of red lights captured by cameras that, pursuant to this bill, are instead civil runnings of red lights. Under this bill, the state would receive no revenue from a civil running of a red light, whereas each such violation that is a criminal violation results in the following assessments and fees, approximately \$286 of which goes to the state:

- \$40—Court Operations Assessment.
- \$35—Conviction Assessment Fee.
- \$1 Night Court Fee.
- Various assessments per each \$10 of base fine:
 - \$10 State Penalty Assessment.
 - \$7 County Penalty Assessment.
 - \$5 Court Construction Penalty Assessment.
 - \$1 Proposition 69 DNA Penalty Assessment.
 - \$4 DNA Identification Fund Penalty Assessment.
 - \$2 Emergency Medical Services Penalty Assessment.
- 20% of base fine State Surcharge.

The committee has no basis on which to estimate either the number of jurisdictions that will implement civil ATE systems pursuant to this bill instead of implementing criminal ATE systems pursuant to existing law, nor on which to estimate the amount of violations that will occur under the civil system that otherwise would have occurred under the criminal system. Therefore, the committee is unable to estimate the amount of revenue the state is likely to forgo.

- 2) Annual cost pressures (General Fund (GF) or Trial Court Trust Fund (TCTF)) of an unknown, but potentially significant amount, to the courts in additional workload resulting from appeals of hearing officer decisions. It is unclear how many appeals may be filed statewide, but the estimated workload cost of one hour of court time is \$1,000. Although courts are not funded on the basis of workload, increased pressure on staff and the TCTF may create a demand for increased court funding from the GF to perform existing duties. The Budget Act of 2025 provides \$82 million ongoing GF to the TCTF for court operations.

The state would not need to reimburse any local costs resulting from this bill because any such costs would result from the locals discretionary actions and not from mandates by the state.

SUPPORT: (Verified 9/8/25)

Streets are For Everyone (co-source)
Streets for All (co-source)
Sacramento Area Bicycle Advocates (co-source)
Active San Gabriel Valley
Bicycle Solutions
Bike LA
Bike Long Beach
Bike Slo County
Bike Sunnyvale
California Contract Cities Association
Car-lite Long Beach
Circulate San Diego
City of Sacramento
City of San Diego
Consumers for Auto Reliability & Safety
Costa Mesa Alliance for Better Streets
East Bay for Everyone
Families for Safe Streets San Diego
League of California Cities
Livable Communities Initiative
Los Angeles Neighborhood Initiative
Los Angeles Walks
Malibu; City of
Move LA
Move Santa Barbara County
Mujeres De LA Tierra
National Coalition for Safer Roads
Norwalk Unides
Pasadena Complete Streets Coalition
Peopleforbikes
San Diego County Bicycle Coalition
San Francisco Bicycle Coalition
Santa Monica Families for Safe Streets
Santa Monica Safe Streets Alliance
Santa Monica Spoke
Slow Down Sacramento
So Cal Cycling
Sonoma County Bicycle Coalition
Street Racing Kills
Strong Towns Artesia

Strong Towns Santa Barbara
Walk San Francisco
West Hollywood Bicycle Coalition
West Hollywood, City of

OPPOSITION: (Verified 9/8/25)

National Motorists Association

ARGUMENTS IN SUPPORT: Writing in support, the League of California Cities states, “[t]he implementation of automated traffic enforcement systems offers numerous potential benefits, including improving public safety by reducing red-light running and decrease intersection-related accidents. By discouraging reckless behavior, these systems help protect pedestrians, cyclists, and motorists alike. Also, by utilizing automated enforcement technology, law enforcement officers can focus on other critical public safety duties rather than routine traffic monitoring, leading to more effective policing efforts. Additionally, this measure imposes a maximum civil penalty of \$100 for violations detected by automated red-light traffic enforcement systems. Finally, SB 720 is completely permissive, allowing cities to decide if they want to establish the use of these automated enforcement programs.”

ARGUMENTS IN OPPOSITION: Writing in opposition, the National Motorists Association states, “The National Motorists Association (NMA), representing the interests of over 27 million licensed drivers in California, must strongly oppose SB-720. This bill eliminates citizens' right to a court trial and to makes the vehicle owner responsible for the actions of others. Additionally, the bill imposes a fine on citizens who are unable or unwilling to provide testimony or evidence against others. This runs counter to our system of justice where defendants are entitled to due process and to be free from government coercion to provide information on the alleged wrongdoing of others.”

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