

Date of Hearing: August 20, 2025

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Buffy Wicks, Chair

SB 78 (Seyarto) – As Amended April 2, 2025

Policy Committee: Transportation

Vote: 16 - 0

Urgency: No

State Mandated Local Program: No

Reimbursable: No

SUMMARY:

This bill requires the Department of Transportation (Caltrans) to prepare a report on highway safety and submit the report to the Legislature by January 1, 2027.

Specifically, this bill requires the Caltrans report identify (a) types of safety enhancements that could be implemented on the state highway system, (b) common factors, if any, contributing to the delay in the delivery of those safety enhancements and (c) strategies to expedite safety enhancements on the state highway system.

FISCAL EFFECT:

The scope of the report this bill is broad, and Caltrans will face significant new analytical and administrative work to produce it. Costs will likely be in the low- to high hundreds of thousands of dollars (special fund) over the period it takes Caltrans to produce the report.

Caltrans anticipates one-time costs of approximately \$543,000 to produce the report. According to Caltrans, this amount covers 1.25 personnel years at an approximate cost \$243,000, as well as, if needed, \$300,000 for a contract with an outside consultant.

COMMENTS:

- 1) **Purpose.** The author contends this bill will lead to a safer transportation system, asserting “California’s future depends on its ability to build and maintain a safe and reliable transportation network.”
- 2) **Background.** The California Office of Traffic Safety (OTS) within the State Transportation Agency uses grants from the federal National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) to fund what OTS describes as “evidence-based education and enforcement programs and technologies designed to make California’s roadways safer.” To this end, OTS identifies and prioritizes the state’s most significant traffic safety problems and develops methods for the distribution of funds to address those problems. And, as described in the Assembly Committee on Transportation analysis of this bill, the state has several ongoing programs to identify deficient and unsafe roadways, and to plan for funding to address those deficiencies to make those roadways safer.

Nonetheless, California’s roadways have become increasingly dangerous in recent years. According to the National Safety Council, vehicle miles traveled dropped 13% in 2020, but the mileage death rate went up 24%. OTS reports that, in 2018, 893 pedestrians were killed

on California roadways, a 26% increase from 2014. Additionally, in 2018, more than 14,000 pedestrians were injured. The total number of pedestrian fatalities between 2009 and 2018 was 7,500, representing a pedestrian fatality rate almost 25% higher than the national average. Projections from NHSTA estimate more than 4,400 people were killed in motor vehicle crashes throughout California in 2022, or about 12 people every day. Early data from NHSTA for 2023 and 2024 estimates a 5% year-over-year increase in traffic fatalities. Across the state, traffic fatalities increased approximately 7.6%, from 3,980 in 2020 to 4,285 in 2021.

This bill requires Caltrans prepare a report on highway safety and submit the report to the Legislature. This approach is similar to last year's SB 936 (Seyarto), which would have required Caltrans complete a study to identify the 15 locations on the state highway system with the highest rates of vehicle collisions and to propose projects to improve road safety at each of these locations. SB 936 passed this committee but was vetoed by the Governor, who asserted that existing planning efforts "can already effectively achieve the goals that this bill seeks to accomplish."

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