

THIRD READING

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Bill No: SB 990  
Author: Grove (R)  
Amended: 3/25/26  
Vote: 21

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SENATE TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE: 12-0, 4/7/26

AYES: Cortese, Strickland, Archuleta, Arreguín, Blakespear, Gonzalez, Grayson,  
Menjivar, Richardson, Seyarto, Valladares, Wiener

NO VOTE RECORDED: Dahle

SENATE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE: Senate Rule 28.8

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**SUBJECT:** Highways: exit information

**SOURCE:** Author

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**DIGEST:** This bill allows the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) to place signs along State Route (SR) 395 near the City of Ridgecrest as part of its Specific Services Sign Program.

**ANALYSIS:**

Existing federal law requires all states to create highway safety programs and adhere to uniform standards promulgated by the United States Department of Transportation (U.S. DOT). (Title 23 United States Code § 402)

Existing state law:

- 1) Provides that Caltrans has full possession and control of the state highway system. (State Highway Code (SHC) § 90)
- 2) Requires Caltrans to adopt rules and regulations for prescribing uniform standards and specifications for all traffic control devices. (Vehicle Code § 21400)

- 3) Directs Caltrans to adopt rules and regulations for its Specific Service Sign Program. As part of these rules, Caltrans must:
  - a) Ensure all business applicants have equal access to the program (SHC § 101.7(b)); and,
  - b) Ensure signs are not placed within urban areas designated by the United States Census Bureau as having a population of 5,000 or more. (SHC § 101.7(c))

This bill authorizes, despite the 5,000 person population limit, the placement of specific service signs at two specified locations of SR 395 near the City of Ridgecrest, until January 1, 2037.

### Comments

- 1) *Purpose of the bill.* According to the author “This bill provides a narrow exception to allow business logo signage along U.S. Route 395 at the China Lake Boulevard exit serving Ridgecrest. Ridgecrest’s essential services are not visible from the highway and are located several miles off the roadway, despite serving motorists traveling a remote 120-mile corridor with limited service options. The bill improves traveler awareness, supports fatigue mitigation on a rural highway, and aligns with prior legislative exceptions granted to similarly situated communities.”
- 2) *General Service Sign Program.* General services signs are white-on-blue signs and are intended to guide motorists to services that are not readily apparent to the driver. A typical general service sign is rectangular and displays an icon, such as a gas pump to indicate access to a gas station. Other services that can be indicated include, among others, hospitals, food, lodging, and electrical vehicle charging. Notably, general services signs do not indicate the specific name of the business offering the service identified.
- 3) *Specific Service Sign Program.* In addition to general service signs, California law sets forth the Specific Service Sign Program, designed to direct motorists not familiar with the area to specific services at or near rural freeway interchanges. Unlike general service signs, these signs display the logos of particular businesses located in the vicinity. Under the program, eligible businesses request to have a sign created and must pay for its cost. Caltrans then approves the request and erects the sign, in compliance with the regulations in

the Manual of Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUCTD). The program is explicitly designed to serve rural areas, and by statute is only authorized in areas with a population of less than 5,000.

Specific service signs accommodate up to six logos per type of service, and only four signs may be installed in a single location. Specific service signs are also limited to only displaying gas, electric vehicle (EV) charging, food, lodging, camping, 24-hour pharmacy, or attraction services. Furthermore, each service type must meet specific requirements regarding the exact services offered, total operating hours, and distance to the highway in order to qualify.

- 4) *The City of Ridgecrest.* Ridgecrest is a city with a population of roughly 28,000 located at the eastern edge of Kern County. It is located several miles east of SR 395 and is the largest city along the highway. It also exists in the middle of a large rural area, where services are often few and far between. Ridgecrest itself offers numerous services; however the city is not easily visible from the highway. The City of Ridgecrest has argued that this creates unsafe conditions on the state highway as fatigued motorists push past Ridgecrest, not realizing they can stop in the city.

Due to its population, the city is not currently eligible for the Specific Service Signs Program, however it should be noted that general services signs do currently exist along the highway near exits leading to the city. Caltrans District 9, in which Ridgecrest is located, is also currently working to revitalize the existing general service signs in the area. This bill would make an exception to the population limit for the Specific Service Sign Program for the city of Ridgecrest. This would allow businesses to request, and Caltrans to erect, business logo signs along SR 395 outside the city.

- 5) *Implementation hurdle.* Both MUCTD and the California Code of Regulations (CCR) (specifically 21 CCR 2111) mandate that any businesses participating in the Specific Service Sign Program must be no more than 3 miles from the location of the signs. However, the majority of the business district in Ridgecrest is approximately 6 to 10 miles away from the proposed locations of the signs. Because this rule is stated in regulation, additional regulatory changes beyond the statutory changes made in this bill may be required to permit Caltrans to place specific services signs at the proposed locations. It should be noted that Caltrans has expressed a willingness to provide necessary technical assistance to Ridgecrest as they navigate adding further signage in the future.

- 6) *Safety, or economics?* Since the inception of the Specific Services Sign program, two specific statutory exceptions to the population limit have been made. These were done for the City of Lincoln (population of roughly 56,000) and the City of Truckee (population of roughly 17,000). In both cases, supporters argued that these signs, which display specific business logos, were necessary to support local businesses. City leaders in Ridgecrest have also made similar arguments, saying their distance from the highway hurts local businesses, and that the addition of specific service signs would help ameliorate this effect.
- 7) *Recommendations against expansion.* As part of the legislation that created the population exceptions for Lincoln and Truckee, Caltrans was also required to create a report for the Legislature about the implementation of the exception and to make recommendations on further expansion of the Specific Service Sign Program. The report was released in 2019.

In that report, Caltrans recommended that the Specific Services Sign Program not be further expanded. This recommendation was based on a number of considerations. First and foremost, Caltrans expressed concern that visual sign congestion from too many signs could create the conditions for distracted driving and pose a safety risk. Furthermore, Caltrans emphasized that the program is not meant to take the place of traditional business advertising.

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

**SUPPORT:** (Verified 4/20/26)

City of Ridgecrest  
Ridgecrest Area Convention & Visitors Bureau  
Ridgecrest Chamber of Commerce  
Ridgecrest Police Department

**OPPOSITION:** (Verified 4/20/26)

None received

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4/21/26 16:19:37

\*\*\*\* END \*\*\*\*