

Date of Hearing: April 6, 2015

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION

Jim Frazier, Chair

AB 162 (Rodriguez) – As Amended March 24, 2015

SUBJECT: State highways: wrong-way driving

SUMMARY: Requires the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) by January 1, 2017 to update their 1989 report on wrong-way driving to reflect recent technological advancements. Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Makes findings and declarations about the dangers of wrong-way driving, the frequency of its occurrence in California, and the need for preventative countermeasures.
- 2) Requires Caltrans, in consultation with the California Department of Highway Patrol (CHP), to update the report entitled *Prevention of Wrong-Way Accidents*, dated June, 1989.
- 3) Requires that the updated report include a review of methods studied and/or implemented by other states, as well as local or non-governmental entities that could help to prevent wrong-way drivers from entering state highways.
- 4) Requires that the updated report include a plan to incorporate the identified treatments and technologies into Caltrans' annual wrong-way monitoring and mitigation program for the state highway system.
- 5) Requires that the updated report be provided to the Legislature on or before January 1, 2017.

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) Generally requires that vehicles drive on the right hand side of the road.
- 2) Specifies that willful violation of the requirement to drive on the right hand side of a highway barrier or dividing section that results in injury or death is punishable by imprisonment.
- 3) Required Caltrans to prepare a one-time study on the prevention of wrong-way accidents on freeways.

FISCAL EFFECT: Unknown

COMMENTS: Although wrong-way crashes occur relatively infrequently, these types of crashes often result in fatalities and serious injuries. The author points out that wrong-way driving has been a persistent traffic safety problem in California despite Caltrans' efforts to reduce it. The author contends that recent reports produced by the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) as well as those produced in other states indicate that there may be additional wrong-way driving countermeasures that could be effectively utilized in California.

To ensure that all potentially effective wrong-way driving countermeasures are considered and utilized in California, the author has introduced this bill which would require Caltrans, in consultation with CHP, to update its 1989 wrong-way accident prevention report to include recent technological advances. The bill also requires Caltrans to include in the updated report, a

plan to incorporate the treatments and countermeasures into Caltrans' annual wrong-way mitigation and monitoring program for state highways.

Wrong-way driving, as the name implies, involves driving a motor vehicle against the direction of traffic. Wrong-way driving can occur on any roadway, but on divided highways and especially on freeways and expressways, wrong-way driving typically results in catastrophic head-on collisions. According to the NTSB, 360 lives were lost annually between 2004 and 2009 as a result of wrong-way driving. According to CHP, in California between 2001 and 2014, there have been a total of 1,541 wrong-way driving collisions resulting in 1,687 injuries and 271 fatalities.

Wrong way drivers typically enter divided highways at intersections and off-ramps. The cause of these wrong-way entries has reportedly shifted over time. An investigation of contributing factors for wrong-way driving prepared for the Illinois Center for Transportation in 2012 reported that in the past, most wrong-way entries were caused by drivers who were confused by ramp configurations. Improved ramp designs, signage, pavement markings, and lighting, however, have reduced driver confusion and associated wrong-way entries. Currently, the NTSB indicates that the majority (60%) of wrong-way crashes are associated with driving under the influence of drugs and/or alcohol (DUI). The NTSB also reports, and the CHP concurs, that elderly and fatigued drivers also contribute to the number wrong-way driving accidents nationwide.

In 1989, as a requirement of SB 233 (Davis), Chapter 153, Statutes of 1987, Caltrans produced a report entitled *Prevention of Wrong-Way Accidents on Freeways*. The purpose of the report was to determine actions and measures needed to prevent wrong-way entries onto state highways. The report, among other things, recommended specific countermeasures and encouraged Caltrans to continue its pro-active annual monitoring and reporting program for wrong-way accidents that was initiated in 1985. Specifically, the annual monitoring program, which is still conducted today, serves to identify locations where wrong-way entries occur statewide, followed by thorough site investigations that include, among other things, follow-up officer interviews with those involved in the accident as well as eyewitnesses. Based on the information gathered in these investigations, Caltrans installs countermeasures where appropriate. Caltrans notes that these safety improvements are the department's top priority and that they are initiated, programmed, and completed as soon as possible.

While Caltrans continues to rely upon the 1989 report to for countermeasures, they also utilize information and countermeasures contained in more recent studies and reports, including those prepared by NTSB. Regardless, updating the 1989 wrong-way driving report as required by this bill would no doubt offer Caltrans the opportunity to evaluate newly available countermeasures and technologies that have been developed and are currently being effectively deployed in other states. A more up-to-date report would undoubtedly allow for broader consideration and deployment of programs and technologies to reduce wrong-way accidents in California.

Previous legislation: SB 233 (Davis), Chapter 153, Statutes of 1987, required Caltrans to produce a study on the wrong-way driving problem on state freeways.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

American Medical Response
California Ambulance Association
California Association of Highway Patrolmen

Opposition

None on file

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