

Date of Hearing: March 23, 2015

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION
Jim Frazier, Chair
AB 173 (Holden) – As Introduced January 22, 2015

SUBJECT: Golf carts: City of La Verne

SUMMARY: Deletes the sunset date of January 1, 2016, on provisions that allow golf carts to be operated along with motor vehicles on specified highways and highway segments in the City of La Verne, thereby allowing the concurrent use indefinitely.

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) Defines a golf cart as a motor vehicle with an unladen weight less than 1,300 pounds, designed to be and operated at not more than 15 miles per hour (mph), and designed to carry golf equipment and not more than two people.
- 2) Prohibits golf carts from being registered with the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) as motor vehicles.
- 3) Defines a low-speed electric vehicle as having a gross vehicle weight of less than 3,000 pounds and able to attain a speed of greater than 20 mph but not more than 35 mph. Low-speed vehicles may be registered with the DMV and are permitted to operate on public roadways with speed limits up to 35 mph.
- 4) Makes it illegal to operate golf carts on streets and highways except when operated immediately adjacent to a golf course (when specific criteria are met) or in separated lanes developed based on a golf cart transportation plan.
- 5) Authorizes any city or county working in cooperation with the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) to establish a golf cart transportation plan that includes, among other things, design criteria and construction of separated golf cart lanes.
- 6) Provides that the requirement for the construction of separated golf cart lanes does not apply to certain residence districts and certain roadway segments in the City of La Verne, provided that certain conditions are met.
- 7) Sunsets the exemption for golf cart use on certain roadways in the City of La Verne on January 1, 2016.

FISCAL EFFECT: Unknown

COMMENTS: The City of La Verne is a small municipality, with a population of 31,000 residents, located in California's San Gabriel Valley. Given the city's agricultural influence, its transportation grid was developed with very narrow streets surrounded by farm land. Although the agricultural land has been developed, streets in the City La Verne remain narrow, some not large enough to accommodate two full lanes of traffic.

The City of La Verne is home to the University of La Verne as well as several large retirement communities and associated golf courses. Because the streets in the town are narrow, residents, along with the university staff, began using golf carts as the primary means of transportation in the 1970's. When the City of La Verne learned that golf cart use on public roadways was prohibited by state law, they sought an exemption through the introduction of AB 1244 (Adams) of 2007, which would have exempted the City of La Verne from the requirement to provide separate lanes for golf carts. AB 1244 was passed by the Legislature but vetoed by Governor Schwarzenegger due to safety concerns expressed by the California Highway Patrol (CHP) regarding mixing faster motor vehicle traffic and slower golf cart traffic in the same travel lanes.

The following year, Assembly Member Adams addressed the CHP's concerns in subsequent legislation, AB 963 (Adams), Chapter 6, Statutes of 2008, which allowed for the use of golf carts on certain highways in the City of La Verne until January 1, 2016. According to analyses prepared for AB 963, the limited exemption was being sought to allow the City of La Verne time to transition from using golf carts to using low-speed electric vehicles, which are authorized for use on public roadways with maximum speeds of 35mph or less.

Since the passage of AB 963 the author reports that golf cart users in the City of La Verne have discovered that low-speed electric vehicles are, in fact, not well suited to the City of La Verne's narrow roadways. Specifically, the author points out that the low-speed electric vehicles available on the market today are too large to be accommodated on La Verne's roadways despite the fact that the overall size and configuration of low-speed electric vehicles has not changed substantially in decades.

To address concerns that the sunset date is approaching and the City of La Verne's golf cart users have not yet converted to low-speed electric vehicle use, the author has introduced this bill which would allow the City of La Verne to continue to use golf carts on highways indefinitely. The author claims that allowing golf cart use on the specified highways in the City of La Verne is appropriate given that the City of La Verne accident records indicate that there have been no accidents or injuries stemming from golf carts use on the specified highways since the exemption went into effect in 2009.

Golf cart use on highways is prohibited primarily to minimize variable speeds among vehicles using the same roadway since speed variation is a leading cause of motor vehicle accidents. By definition, golf carts travel at speeds of 20 mph or below and they lack the basic safety equipment required by state and federal law for street-legal motor vehicles. These features include lights, reflectors, bumpers, crash-worthy construction, seatbelts, and air bags. While existing law does require the City of La Verne to call for some safety equipment on golf carts using specified highways (windshield, taillights, headlights, brake lights, and seatbelts), this equipment does not make these vehicles safe should they collide with other larger and heavier vehicles travelling at substantially higher rates of speed. Additionally, despite the fact that the City of La Verne has not experienced any accidents or injuries as a result of the exemption, it is likely eliminating the sunset could encourage other cities to seek a similar exemption thereby expanding this potentially unsafe practice.

Previous legislation: AB 963 (Adams), Chapter 6, Statutes of 2008, allowed the City of La Verne, until January 1, 2016, to designate a highway or portion thereof for use by both golf carts and motor vehicles under specified conditions.

AB 1244 (Adams), of 2007, would have exempted the City of La Verne, from the requirement to provide separate lanes for golf carts. AB 1244 was passed by the Legislature but vetoed due to concerns about the safety of mixing motor vehicle traffic and golf carts in the same travel lanes.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

University of La Verne (Sponsor)
City of La Verne
City of La Verne Fire Department
City of La Verne Police Department
Hillcrest
LeadingAge California
San Gabriel Valley Economic Partnership
University of La Verne, Office of the President

Opposition

None on file

Analysis Prepared by: Victoria Alvarez / TRANS. / (916) 319-2093