

Date of Hearing: April 4, 2016

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION

Jim Frazier, Chair

AB 2073 (Holden) – As Introduced February 17, 2016

SUBJECT: Golf carts: City of La Verne

SUMMARY: Allows for the use of utility- and shuttle-style golf carts as part of the City of La Verne's golf cart transportation plan.

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.
- 4) Provides that low-speed vehicles may be registered with the DMV and are permitted to operate on public roadways with speed limits up to 35 mph.
- 5) 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.
- 6) 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.
- 7) 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 specified conditions are met.
- 8) Authorizes 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.

FISCAL EFFECT: Unknown

COMMENTS: According to the author, it recently came to the attention of the City of La Verne that the utility- and shuttle-style golf carts that have been in use for many years do not comply with the definition of a golf cart and, therefore, are not in compliance for use under the city's golf cart transportation plan. To ensure that the City of La Verne can continue to use these vehicles, the author has introduced this bill to clarify that these vehicles are authorized for use pursuant to the plan.

The City of La Verne is a small municipality, with a population of 31,000 residents, located in California's San Gabriel Valley whose transportation grid was originally developed with very narrow streets surrounded by farm land. Although the agricultural land has been developed, streets in the City of 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 with 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.

Golf cart use on highways is generally prohibited because variable speeds among vehicles is a leading cause of motor vehicle accidents. Furthermore, by definition, golf carts travel at speeds of 20 mph or below and 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.

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 added the requirement that certain safety features be added to golf carts used in the City of La Verne (windshield, taillights, headlights, brake lights, and seatbelts) and allowed for the use of golf carts only on certain roadways until January 1, 2016, to give users time to transition to low-speed electric vehicle use.

Since the passage of AB 963, golf cart users in the City of La Verne claimed that low-speed electric vehicles were not well suited to the city's narrow roadways. To address concerns that the sunset date for the golf cart transportation plan was approaching and golf cart users in the City of La Verne had not yet converted to low-speed electric vehicle use, AB 173 (Holden), Chapter 65, Statutes of 2015, was passed by the Legislature deleting the 2016 sunset on the authority of the City of La Verne to use golf carts on city streets, thereby continuing the authority indefinitely.

According to the author, while AB 173 was pending the Governor's signature, CHP noted that some of the golf carts used in the area do not meet the definition of a golf cart (weighing less than 1,300 pounds and designed to carry not more than two persons including the driver). Specifically, CHP was referring to the utility-style golf carts that exceed 1,300 pound weight limit and the shuttle-style golf carts that exceed the 1,300 pound weight limit and carry up to eight passengers. According to the author, these vehicles are commonly used by the university as well as retirement communities in the city to carry people and equipment. Despite their frequent use, local police department records indicate that there have been no recorded accidents or injuries stemming from the use of utility- or shuttle-style golf carts on public roadways in the city. Because these vehicles provide important utility to the community, the author is seeking to add these vehicles to the type of golf carts that can be utilized pursuant to the city's golf cart transportation plan.

Committee comments: AB 2073 is one of a series of bills that incrementally allows the City of LaVerne to continue their existing practice of using golf carts on public roadways alongside motor vehicles. AB 963 first authorized the use of golf carts on certain roadways until 2016 to allow the city time to convert to NEV's use. As the 2016 deadline approached, the City of LaVerne had not converted to NEV use claiming that NEVs were too large to be accommodated on the city's roadways. It should be noted that immediately after the passage of AB 173, which allowed indefinite use of golf carts, the city is now requesting an exemption that would allow for the use certain golf carts that are nearly identical in size and configuration to NEVs.

Related legislation: AB 2736 (Chu) makes non-substantive amendments to provisions related to golf cart transportation plans. AB 2736 is currently awaiting a hearing in the Assembly Rules Committee.

Previous legislation: AB 173 (Holden), Chapter 65, Statutes of 2015, deleted the 2016 sunset on the authority of the City of La Verne to permit golf carts to be used on city streets thereby continuing the authority indefinitely.

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

City of La Verne Police Department
Hillcrest Retirement Community
University of La Verne

Opposition

None on file

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