

Date of Hearing: April 6, 2015

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION

Jim Frazier, Chair

AB 40 (Ting) – As Introduced December 1, 2014

SUBJECT: Golden Gate Bridge: sidewalk fees

SUMMARY: Prohibits the imposition of any tolls or access fees for pedestrians and bicyclists on the Golden Gate Bridge sidewalks.

EXISTING LAW: Establishes the Golden Gate Bridge, Highway, and Transportation District (GGBHTD), which, among other functions and duties, owns and operates the Golden Gate Bridge.

FISCAL EFFECT: Unknown

COMMENTS: When the Golden Gate Bridge first opened in 1937, pedestrians had to pay 5 cents to cross. The sidewalk toll eventually rose to 10 cents before it was abolished in 1970. Pedestrians and bicyclists have been able to cross the bridge for free ever since. GGBHTD, the owner and operator of the bridge, has explored reinstating a toll for use of the sidewalks several times since then but has never elected to impose the toll. GGBHTD is currently facing an operating deficit of \$32.9 million over the next five years as well as \$209 million in unfunded capital needs and recently adopted a 45-point plan aimed at keeping the district solvent. One point in the plan is to evaluate sidewalk access fees.

In addition to the Golden Gate, there are seven other toll bridges in California - the Antioch Bridge, the Benicia/Martinez Bridge, the Carquinez Bridge, the Dumbarton Bridge, the Richmond-San Rafael Bridge, the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge, and the San Mateo Hayward Bridge - all of which are owned by the state. Only four of these bridges - the Antioch, the Benicia-Martinez, the Carquinez, and the Dumbarton - allow bicycles and pedestrians to cross. The new eastern span of the Bay Bridge includes a bicycle and pedestrian path that will eventually extend from Oakland to Yerba Buena Island but will not extend across the entire bridge to San Francisco. There is currently no toll for bicyclists or pedestrians on any of the state-owned toll bridges.

AB 40 would prohibit GGBHTD from imposing a toll for pedestrians or bicyclists to cross the Golden Gate Bridge. According to the author, the bill would promote non-vehicular forms of transportation across the bridge that improve air quality, combat climate change and encourage physical activity. The author also argues that maintaining free access to the Golden Gate Bridge's sidewalks is critical to preserving overall access to the extensive network of parks, paths, and trails that connect the North Bay to the South Bay, of which the bridge is a part.

Writing in support, the California Bicycle Coalition argues that "More bicycling solves so many problems in California that government agencies, including the Golden Gate Bridge, Highway and Transportation District, should welcome and encourage bicycling. The idea that 'everyone should pay their fair share' is a noble one but to use that argument to justify charging people when they walk or bicycle reflects a naïve and erroneous understanding of how we pay for the benefits and impacts of our transportation system."

Writing in opposition, GGBHTD argues that "the fact that the proposed legislation applies only to the District is problematic from a policy perspective. If the Legislature believes that there should be a prohibition on charging bicycles and pedestrians for access to bridge sidewalks, then the Legislature should apply this restriction universally." The district will remove its opposition if the bill is amended to apply to all toll bridges rather than just to the Golden Gate Bridge.

Committee Concerns: This bill focuses on the one toll bridge in California that is not owned by the state. It is not clear why one local government entity should be prohibited from charging bridge tolls for pedestrians and bicyclists while leaving open the option for such a charge on state-owned toll bridges. If free bridge access for those walking and using bicycles is good policy on the Golden Gate Bridge as a means of promoting these modes of transportation and their many benefits, surely it is good policy on all toll bridges.

Proposed Amendment: Apply the prohibition on bicyclist and pedestrian fees to all toll bridges in California that allow bicycle and pedestrian access.

Prior Legislation: AB 748 (Wolk) of 2005, would have prohibited, through 2009, the imposition of a toll for pedestrians or bicycles on any bridge or highway facility under the jurisdiction of GGBHTD or Caltrans on which the travel of pedestrians and bicycles is otherwise authorized. AB 748 was vetoed by Governor Schwarzenegger.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

California Bicycle Coalition
California Travel Association
Save our Recreation
Walk San Francisco

Opposition

Golden Gate Bridge, Highway, and Transportation District (unless amended)

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