

Date of Hearing: March 19, 2024

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION

Lori D. Wilson, Chair

AB 1904 (Ward) – As Introduced January 23, 2024

SUBJECT: Transit buses: yield right-of-way sign

SUMMARY: Authorizes all transit buses to be equipped with a yield-right-of-way sign on the left rear of the bus. Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Authorizes, but does not require, the yield right-of-way sign to flash simultaneously with the rear turn signal lamps.
- 2) Authorizes the sign to be a static decal that is affixed to the left rear of the bus.
- 3) Requires a yield-right-of-way sign with flashing light-emitting diode (LED) sign, to be designed to warn a person operating a motor vehicle approaching the rear of the bus that the bus is entering traffic and be illuminated by a red flashing light when the bus is signaling in preparation for entering a traffic lane after having stopped to receive or discharge passengers.
- 4) Requires a participating transit agency to undertake a public education program to encourage motorists to yield to a transit bus when the sign is activated.

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) Authorizes, but does not require, the Santa Cruz Metropolitan Transit District (SCMTD) and the Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority (VTA) buses to be equipped with a yield-right-of-way sign on the left rear of the bus. (Vehicle Code Section (VEH) 24617)
- 2) Authorizes, but does not require, the yield right-of-way sign to flash simultaneously with the rear turn signal lamps. (VEH 24617)
- 3) Requires a yield-right-of-way sign to be designed to warn a person operating a motor vehicle approaching the rear of the bus that the bus is entering traffic and be illuminated by a red flashing light when the bus is signaling in preparation for entering a traffic lane after having stopped or receive or discharge passengers. (VEH 24617)
- 4) Requires a participating transit agency to undertake a public education program to encourage motorists to yield to a transit bus when the sign is activated. (VEH 24617)

FISCAL EFFECT: Unknown

COMMENTS: According to *Moving the Bus Safely Back into Traffic Phase II*, a report authored by the Center for Urban Transportation Research at the University of South Florida, yield-to-bus signs with LED lights on the back of a bus resulted in significantly increased instances of motorist yielding to buses trying to get back in the travel lane. Cars only yielded to buses 41% of the time when there was only a yield sign, while they yielded 78% of the time when yield-to-bus LED signs existed. In Daytona Beach, buses with LED yield-to-bus signs saw a 50% increase in yielding behavior from motorists. Yield-to-bus LED signs helped reduce the re-entry time of buses in bus bays on minor urban arterials from 10% to 23%.

According to *Best Practices in Implementing Tactical Transit Lanes*, a guide produced by UCLA Institute of Transportation Studies (ITS), research suggests that reducing the total amount of time it takes a transit rider to go door-to-door by 5-15% can increase urban peak ridership by 2-9%.

According to the author, “AB 1904 would allow all transit agencies to exercise the authority to affix flashing LED yield right-of-way signs to the left rear of their buses, reducing dwell times and facilitating reentry into traffic, provided the transit agency’s governing board approves a resolution on the matter. This authority would reduce traffic delays experienced by transit buses when attempting to reenter traffic and facilitate safer reentry, allowing operators to provide more timely services.”

Transit vehicles often are slowed down in traffic because of the time it takes for them to re-enter traffic lanes. AB 1218 (Keeley), Chapter 482, Statutes of 1999 created a three-year pilot project in which all non-emergency vehicles had to yield to transit buses re-entering the active traffic lane from a designated bus stop when the transit bus displayed a lighted yield right-of-way signal located on the left rear of the transit bus. AB 1218 permitted VTA, SCMTD, Alameda-Contra-Costa Transit District, and the Orange County Transportation Authority to participate in the pilot project.

Only VTA and SCMTD ultimately participated in the pilot program. All VTA and SCMTD transit buses were outfitted with the yield signal by April 2001. Under the pilot project, the California Highway Patrol (CHP) issued a report in 2003 assessing the effectiveness of the pilot. The CHP found that, 60% of VTA transit bus operators indicated they felt the yield-To-Bus law was at least “somewhat effective” in promoting safe driving conditions. The majority of transit bus operators considered the yield-to-bus law to be effective in promoting safe driving conditions if promoted to the public and enforced by local law enforcement. VTA reported three collisions that could be attributed to a violation of failing to yield to a bus, none of which were fatal, and reported that no significant traffic congestion issues were directly attributable to the new law.

SCMTD reported to CHP that the yield-to bus program allowed their transit bus operators greater safety in re-entering traffic, especially at night. SCMTD received no complaints regarding the program, and law enforcement in Santa Cruz County supported the legislation, yet no citations for a violation of failing to yield to a bus were issued. No collisions were reported that were directly attributable to the use, or non-use, of the yield signal.

CHP concluded that “there is no compelling evidence to lead us to endorse [this law] becoming permanent and statewide. No efficiency study was provided to reflect any increase in “on time” service to the public due to implementation of [the law] and only one citation, in Santa Clara County, was issued for a violation of [the law]. No public opinion survey was provided to substantiate customer satisfaction with the new law. Although there is no evidence to endorse, there is also no evidence to reject this section.”

In 2003, AB 557 (Lowenthal) would have removed the sunset provision in AB 1218 and made the pilot statewide. That bill ultimately failed to pass the Senate Transportation Committee. In 2007, AB 1492 (Laird), Chapter 451 authorized SCMTD and VTA to continue using the yield signs. The initial bill allowed law enforcement to enforce failure to yield to the bus. The CHP, the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV), and the Department of Transportation (Caltrans) opposed that bill, arguing that that the local standard for the service areas of VTA and SCMTD,

the counties of Santa Clara and Santa Cruz, will create unsafe conditions when motorists from outside the counties drive through them, as they will be unfamiliar with the unique, localized rules of the road. Under current law, the only time a motorist when in a traffic lane must yield is to emergency vehicles. Ultimately AB 1492 was signed into law, but removed the provision of the bill that would have authorized law enforcement to cite a motorist who failed to yield to a bus.

Previous Legislation:

AB 1492 (Laird), Chapter 451, Statutes of 2007, authorized SCMTD and VTA to use yield signs on the back of their buses.

AB 626 (Oropeza), Chapter 437, Statutes of 2002, extended the sunset date of AB 1218 by an additional year, until January 1, 2004, the requirement that drivers in certain counties yield the right-of-way to transit buses merging with traffic.

AB 1218 (Keeley), Chapter 482, Statutes of 1999, required all non-emergency vehicles to yield to a transit bus re-entering the active traffic lane from a designated bus stop location when the transit bus displays the lighted yield right-of-way located on the left rear of the transit bus until January 1, 2003.

In 2003, AB 557 (Lowenthal) would have repealed the sunset date that any transit operator may adopt the provisions above and established an "opt out" clause. AB 557 died in the Senate Transportation Committee.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:**Support**

California Transit Association
Ventura County Transportation Commission

Opposition

None on file

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