

Date of Hearing: April 8, 2024

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION

Lori D. Wilson, Chair

AB 2669 (Ting) – As Introduced February 14, 2024

SUBJECT: Toll bridges: tolls

SUMMARY: Prohibits a toll from being charged for passage of a pedestrian, a bicycle, or a personal micromobility device on any bridge in the Golden Gate Bridge, Highway, and Transportation District (GGBHTD), any state-owned bridge, and any bridge that private entities have entered into a franchise agreement with the state, unless the bridge was under construction on or after January 1, 2025, and the tolls are used to fund the cost of constructing the bridge.

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) Created the California Transportation Commission (CTC) and assigned it all responsibility previously assigned to the California Toll Bridge Authority, including directing and authorizing the Department of Transportation (Caltrans) to build toll bridges. (Streets and Highways Code (SHC) 30150)
- 2) Created the Bay Area Toll Authority (BATA) to administer the base \$1 auto toll for the San Francisco Bay area’s seven state-owned toll bridges. BATA operates under the Metropolitan Transportation Commission. In 2005, BATA’s responsibilities were expanded to include administration of all toll revenues and joint oversight of the toll bridge construction program along with Caltrans and the CTC. (SHC 30101-30109)
- 3) Requires Caltrans and CTC to consider the inclusion of bicycle and pedestrian facilities on each new toll bridge designed and constructed, including appropriate connections. These facilities are required to be included on each new bridge if the commission finds that they are economically and physically feasible. (SHC 30112)
- 4) Established the Golden Gate Bridge, Highway, and Transportation District (GGBHTD) which owns and operates the Golden Gate Bridge and sets tolls. (SHC 27500-27512)

FISCAL EFFECT: Unknown

COMMENTS: California has eight toll bridges, all located in the San Francisco Bay Area. Seven of those bridges — 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 — are owned by the state. The eighth bridge is owned and operated by GGBHTD. Of these bridges, five currently have pedestrian and bicycle access: the Golden Gate, the Antioch, the Benicia-Martinez, the Carquinez, and the Dumbarton bridges. There is currently no toll for pedestrians or bicyclists on any of the state-owned toll bridges or the Golden Gate Bridge.

According to the author, “The Golden Gate Bridge is recognizable around the world as a California landmark treasured by local residents and tourists alike. The bridge is a transportation and recreation corridor between San Francisco and Marin County and is crossed by tens of millions of people each year. For the past 50+ years, pedestrians and bicyclists have been able to

cross the bridge free of charge. This policy has kept state-owned bridges open and accessible to all individuals while exemplifying California's commitment to carbon emissions and fostering sustainable transportation alternatives. AB 2669 will enshrine the prohibition of state-owned bridges from imposing any tolls for pedestrian and bicyclist use of sidewalks. This bill will preserve an incentive for people to pursue emission-free methods of active transportation that are good for our environment and our health, while ensuring protecting free access for pedestrians and bicyclists for all of California's bridges.”

When the Golden Gate Bridge first opened in 1937, pedestrians had to pay five cents to cross. The sidewalk toll eventually rose to 10 cents before being abolished in 1970. At that time, vehicle crossings were \$0.50.

Approximately a decade ago, the GGBHTD's board approved a study to determine whether a pedestrian/bicyclist toll would be feasible and helpful in light of the district's budget woes. According to the district, about 6,000 cyclists and 10,000 pedestrians cross the bridge on a good weather day. Sidewalk access fees were just one consideration in a 45-point plan to help GGBHTD remain solvent, as they faced fiscal challenges for unfunded capital needs and an operating deficit at that time. Opposition to this toll, resulted in GGBHTD withdrawing the proposal.

Similarly, the GGBHTD currently faces fiscal challenges, but the board has no plans to pursue a sidewalk toll. To address fiscal needs, the district is working within the region on transit funding solutions, and discussing the possibility of increasing vehicle tolls.

Currently, there are only four bridges in the United States that collect pedestrian tolls. They are all border crossings: the Rainbow Bridge at Niagara Falls and three bridges linking El Paso, Texas with Ciudad, Juarez.

The San Francisco Bike Coalition writing in support states “Removing tolls for people biking and walking has kept many bridges open and accessible to all individuals while exemplifying California's commitment to cutting carbon emissions and fostering sustainable transportation alternatives. Free public access to bridges across the state has also bolstered decades of work to promote public recreation by linking together a network of parks, paths, and trails.

We strongly support this legislation that would promote non-vehicular forms of transportation across all bridges that improve air quality, combat climate change, and ensure equitable access.”

Committee Comments: Not charging a toll for pedestrians, cyclists, and micromobility devices crossing bridges helps to support the state's goal of increasing active transportation to help reduce greenhouse gas emissions. However, revenue from these tolls can be used to pay for maintenance and other costs, such as debt service, improvements to the corridor, and seismic retrofitting of bridges.

This bill would allow the state and locals to retain the authority to set tolls for bridges under construction and beginning construction after January 1, 2025. These tolls could be used to fund the cost of building new infrastructure.

To achieve the goals of both 1) funding the cost of new bridges and 2) encouraging active transportation on those bridges; if there was a desire to impose a toll, tolls could be set that are lower for pedestrians, cyclists, and micromobility devices than for vehicles.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

California Bicycle Coalition
Marin County Bicycle Coalition
San Francisco Bicycle Coalition
Streets for All

Opposition

None on file

Analysis Prepared by: Farra Bracht / TRANS. / (916) 319-2093