

Date of Hearing: June 17, 2024

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION  
Lori D. Wilson, Chair  
AJR 19 (Juan Carrillo) – As Introduced May 21, 2024

**SUBJECT:** Vehicles: disabled veterans

**SUMMARY:** Urges the federal government to allow vehicles registered to disabled veterans to utilize high occupancy vehicle (HOV) lanes.

**EXISTING LAW:**

Existing federal law establishes the authority for occupancy requirements of vehicles authorized to access HOV lanes (23 United States Code 166):

- a) Provides for limited exceptions to an established occupancy requirement including high occupancy toll (HOT) vehicles and low emission and energy efficient vehicles; and,
- b) Requires a public entity that allows HOT vehicles and low emission and energy efficient vehicles access to a HOV facility to submit a report demonstrating that the facility is not already degraded, and that the presence of the vehicles will not cause the facility to become degraded

**FISCAL EFFECT:** Unknown. This bill is keyed non-fiscal by the Legislative Counsel.

**COMMENTS:** An HOV lane, commonly referred to as a "carpool" or "diamond" lane, is part of a traffic management strategy designed to provide an incentive for commuters to form carpools by offering reduced travel times. In order to drive in an HOV lane, a driver must typically have two or more occupants in their car. By promoting carpooling, HOV lanes decrease congestion and reduce vehicular pollution. Existing federal law authorizes states to allow clean air vehicles such as a battery electric vehicle, and toll-paying vehicles to access HOV lanes without meeting occupancy requirements.

*HOV lane degradation:* The federal government requires traffic in HOV lanes to move at a certain speed. Annually, the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) must complete an HOV Facilities Degradation Report to assess if the state is in compliance with federal law. An HOV facility is considered degraded if the average traffic speed during the morning or evening weekday peak hour period is less than 45 mph for more than 10% of the time over a consecutive 180-day period. Recent reports have found that 22% to 40% of the state's HOV facilities do not meet federal requirements. According to the July 2023 report, in 2022 "Of the 1,130 lane-miles monitored during the morning peak hour period, about 22% (245 lane-miles) were degraded. Of the 1,130 lane-miles monitored during the afternoon peak hour period, approximately 36% (410 lane-miles) were degraded. District 7 (Los Angeles area), District 8 (Riverside and San Bernardino Counties), and District 12 (Orange County) had the most degradation. Approximately 40% of District 7, District 8, and District 12 HOV facilities that operated in both peak hour periods experienced degradation in both peak hour periods."

According to the DMV, as of March 2024, 29,361 vehicles with Disabled Veteran License Plates are registered. The allowance of almost 30,000 additional vehicles to access HOV lanes would likely increase HOV lane degradation and increase the number of HOV facilities that do not meet federal requirements.

*According to the author*, “Disabled veterans make significant sacrifices in the line of duty and often have unique needs when adjusting to civilian life. Because of this, equitable solutions are needed to address the challenges they face. When it comes to accessing health care, many disabled veterans may need specialized care. However, despite the strides California has made, inadequate transportation remains a barrier.

This is made more apparent in historically underserved communities like mine. In the High Desert, though there are distinct concentrations of veterans in the Antelope and Victor valleys, along with military industry, these folks often lack access to certain specialized medical facilities. In lieu of these facilities, disabled veterans must commute down the hill to the urban cores of Los Angeles and San Bernardino. This resolution seeks to ease the gap disabled veterans face when commuting for care.”

**REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:****Support**

None on file

**Opposition**

None on file

**Analysis Prepared by:** Aaron Kurz / TRANS. / (916) 319-2093