

Date of Hearing: April 28, 2025

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION

Lori D. Wilson, Chair

AB 1114 (Ávila Farías) – As Amended April 21, 2025

**SUBJECT:** Emergency vehicles: fee and toll exemptions

**SUMMARY:** Clarifies existing law to exempt publicly and privately-owned ambulances from paying a toll or charge on a vehicular crossing or toll highway when responding to or returning from an emergency call. Specifically, **this bill**:

- 1) Clarifies that emergency authorized vehicles owned by a public or private entity are not required to pay certain fees, except fees for duplicate plates, certificates, or cards.
- 2) Clarifies the exemption of public and private ambulance service providers from tolls or other charges on a vehicular crossing, toll crossing, toll highway, or high-occupancy lane under certain circumstances.
- 3) Authorizes an ambulance corporation executive chief to certify in writing that a vehicle was exempt from a toll charge, if an operator of a toll facility elects to bill an agency or department for use of the facility.

**EXISTING LAW:**

- 1) Exempts an authorized emergency vehicle from any requirement to pay a toll or other charge on a vehicular crossing, toll highway, or high-occupancy toll (HOT) lane, if all of the following conditions are satisfied. (Vehicle Code Section (VEH) 23301.5):
  - a) The authorized emergency vehicle is properly displaying an exempt California license plate, and is properly identified or marked as an authorized emergency vehicle, including, but not limited to, displaying an external surface-mounted red warning light, blue warning light, or both, and displaying public agency identification, including, but not limited to, “Fire Department,” “Sheriff,” or “Police; ”
  - b) The vehicle is being driven while responding to or returning from an urgent or emergency call, engaged in an urgent or emergency response, or engaging in a fire station coverage assignment directly related to an emergency response:
    - i. An “urgent” response or call means an incident or circumstance that requires an immediate response to a public safety-related incident, but does not warrant the use of emergency warning lights. “Urgent” does not include any personal use, commuting, training, or administrative uses.
  - c) An authorized emergency vehicle is not exempt from any requirement to pay a toll while traveling in a HOT lane when returning from an urgent or emergency call, or from being engaged in an urgent or emergency response, or from engaging in a fire station coverage assignment directly related to an emergency response; and,

- d) The driver of the vehicle determines that the use of the toll facility shall likely improve the availability or response and arrival time of the authorized emergency vehicle and its delivery of essential public safety services.
- 2) If the operator of a toll facility elects to send a bill or invoice to the public agency for the use of the toll facility by an authorized emergency vehicle, the fire chief, police chief, county sheriff, head of the public agency, or designee, is authorized to certify in writing that the authorized emergency vehicle was responding to or returning from an emergency call or response and is exempt from the payment of the toll or other charge in accordance with this section. The letter shall be accepted by the toll operator in lieu of payment and is a public document.
- 3) Provides that the provisions of this bill do not prohibit or amend an agreement entered into between a public agency and a toll operator that establishes mutually-agreed upon terms for the use of the facility, and further provides that they do not preclude a toll operator from establishing a policy that meet or exceeds them.
- 4) Defines “toll facility” to include a toll road, high-occupancy vehicle lane, toll bridge, or a vehicular crossing for which payment of a toll or other charge is required.
- 5) Requires the owner or operator of a toll facility, upon the request of a public or private local emergency service provider, to enter into an agreement for the use of a toll facility, including, but not limited to, being exempt from toll payment.
- 6) Defines an authorized emergency vehicle as any publicly owned and operated ambulance, lifeguard, or lifesaving equipment or any privately owned or operated ambulance licensed by the Commissioner of the California Highway Patrol to operate in response to emergency calls. (VEH 165)

**FISCAL EFFECT:** Unknown

**COMMENTS:** *According to the author, “The use of toll roads is a crucial component of emergency response operations as it allows first responders to reach critical situations more efficiently, reducing travel time and improving patient outcomes. While current law exempts authorized emergency vehicles from paying toll fees when responding to and returning from emergency calls, this exemption does not explicitly extend to private ambulance providers. As a result, private ambulance companies face significant financial burdens due to toll costs, despite performing the same life-saving services as public ambulance providers.”*

First responders sometimes use toll roads when responding to or returning from emergencies, especially in congested urban areas. Current law exempts authorized emergency vehicles from tolls, under certain circumstances. Toll operators may still charge the authorized emergency vehicle's public agency or private company for use of the facility. Tolling processes are largely automated and each tolling agency requires a process be established with them to allow the toll facility to recognize emergency authorized vehicles and process the transaction in accordance with the agreement. The public agency is exempt from the payment of the toll if a fire chief, police chief, county sheriff, head of the public agency, or designee, certifies that the authorized emergency vehicle was responding to or returning from an emergency call.

Current law requires that upon request of a private or public local emergency provider toll operators enter into agreements to establish mutually agreed upon terms, including exempting them from tolls. Generally, these agreements do not apply to companies outside the area. Furthermore, who toll agencies enter into agreements with varies across toll agencies. For example, the Transportation Corridor Agencies, which operates in Orange County, has an exemption for privately owned ambulances and the Riverside County Transportation Commission has granted exemptions to the CHP and local fire departments.

Statewide, there are approximately 3,600 licensed ambulances covering 337 emergency ambulance service areas statewide, of which, more than 220 are served by private ambulance companies. At this time, few private ambulance companies have sought agreements from tolling agencies to exempt them from tolls.

This bill intends to ensure that all private ambulance companies can enter into agreements with tolling agencies to exempt them from tolls. Under current law, private ambulance companies and tolling authorities in Los Angeles have entered into agreements. However, it appears that tolling authorities differ in how they interpret existing law when entering into these agreements. This bill aims to clarify that toll operators are required to enter into these agreements with private ambulance companies.

In an effort to ensure that exiting law is implemented uniformly, the California Toll Operators Committee (CTOC) recently developed a process for exempting private ambulances from tolls. This process may resolve the concerns of private ambulance companies that this bill attempts to address. CTOC is the statewide oversight and standards committee for tolling interoperability. It will be important for the author's office to follow up and see if CTOC's development of a process has resolved this issue.

The California Ambulance Association, *sponsors of this bill*, writes, "Toll roads are a crucial component of emergency response operations, as they allow first responders to reach critical situations more efficiently, reducing travel time, and improving patient outcomes. While current law exempts public emergency vehicles from toll fees when responding to and returning from emergency calls, this exemption does not extend to private providers.

As a result, private providers face additional burdens due to toll costs, despite performing the same life-saving services as public ambulances. Although toll operators have the authority to negotiate agreements with private providers, these agreements are often limited in scope and do not extend beyond specific jurisdictions.

This inconsistency creates disparities in emergency response operations, particularly in regions where private ambulances play a critical role in supplementing public emergency medical services. Without a uniform policy ensuring toll exemptions for all emergency responders, private ambulance providers may face delays or financial strain that could impact their ability to provide timely care."

*Previous legislation.* AB 902 (Rodriguez), Chapter 124, Statutes of 2023 requires the owner or operator of a toll facility, upon the request of a public or private local emergency service provider, to enter into an agreement for the use of a toll facility, including, but not limited to, being exempt from toll payment.

AB 2270 (Seyarto), Chapter 497, Statutes of 2022 requires the owner or operator of a toll facility, upon the request of a local emergency service provider, to enter into an agreement to establish mutually agreed upon terms for use of the toll facility.

AB 254 (Jeffries), Chapter 425, Statutes of 2009 establishes the circumstances under which an authorized emergency vehicle is exempt from paying a toll on a tolled facility.

AB 261 (Seyarto of 2021) would have exempted an authored emergency vehicle from payment of an HOT toll when returning from an urgent emergency call.

AB 697 (Fong of 2017) would have exempted privately owned emergency ambulances, as defined, from requirements to pay tolls, under conditions similar to exemptions already granted for authorized emergency vehicles; defines "private ambulance" to mean a privately owned emergency ambulance licensed by the California Highway Patrol (CHP).

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

California Ambulance Association, sponsor  
AmbuServe  
Amwest Ambulance  
California State Sheriffs' Association  
LIFWest Ambulance  
Nor-Cal Ambulance  
Sierra Emergency Medical Services Alliance

**Opposition**

None on file

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