

Date of Hearing: April 13, 2026

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION

Lori D. Wilson, Chair

AB 2372 (Hoover) – As Amended April 6, 2026

SUBJECT: Vehicles: tolls

SUMMARY: Provides that an authorized emergency vehicle may be exempt from paying a toll on a vehicular crossing, toll highway, or high-occupancy toll if the California Highway Patrol (CHP) authorizes the vehicle as an emergency vehicle and clarifies that, in lieu of CHP authorization, upon the request of a private or public local emergency service provider, the owner or operator of a toll facility shall, in good faith, enter into an agreement to establish mutually agreed-upon terms, including being exempt from the toll payment.

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) Defines “authorized emergency vehicle” to mean, among other entities:
 - a) 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 (CHP) to operate in response to emergency calls;
 - b) Any publicly owned vehicle operated by any federal, state, or local agency, department, or district employing peace officers, as specified;
 - c) Any vehicle owned or operated by a federally recognized Indian tribe used in responding to emergency, fire, ambulance, or lifesaving calls, as specified; and,
 - d) Any vehicle for which an authorized emergency vehicle permit has been issued by the CHP (Vehicle Code (VEH) §165).
- 2) 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 (VEH §23301.5).
- 3) Defines “urgent response or call” to mean 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. Stipulates that “urgent” does not include any personal use, commuting, training, or administrative uses (VEH §23301.5).
- 4) Exempts an authorized emergency vehicle from the 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:
 - 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,” “Police, or “Ambulance”;

- 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; and,
 - c) 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 (VEH §23301.5).
- 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 to establish mutually agreed upon terms for the use of a toll facility, including, but not limited to, being exempt from toll payment. An owner or operator of a toll facility may adopt a policy that meets or exceeds existing law but if an emergency service provider or the owner or operator of a toll facility opts to terminate an agreement, existing law would apply to the emergency service provider and the toll facility (VEH §23301.5).

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 public emergency vehicles from paying toll fees when responding to and returning from emergency calls, this exemption does not 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. AB 2372 will bring much-needed financial equity to an industry already facing significant economic challenges by ensuring that private ambulance providers qualify for the same toll exemptions”.

As described below, there are two pathways under existing law for a private ambulance company to be eligible for a toll exemption, but these pathways are fraught with legal or compliance obstacles.

Pathway #1. AB 254 (Jeffries, Chapter 425, Statutes of 2009) exempted “authorized emergency vehicles” (e.g., private or public ambulance, police, fire, federal or tribal government), licensed by the CHP, from all toll facilities (toll road, high occupancy toll or HOT lane, toll bridge, toll highway, or vehicular crossing where a toll or charge is required) while responding to or returning from an urgent or emergency call, engaged in an urgent or emergency response, or engaging in a fire-related emergency assignment. The bill’s premise was that an exemption from toll facilities would expedite an emergency vehicle’s response or arrival time. Under the law, an emergency vehicle must also have an exempt license plate (e.g., exempt from registration fees) and be properly marked as an emergency vehicle, including warning lights and exterior identification (e.g., “ambulance”).

However, under current state law only public entities are eligible for an exempt license plate. Therefore, private ambulances are not eligible for an exemption under this pathway and must seek an exemption under pathway #2 as described below. This has created confusion and as a result some toll agencies have denied exemption requests or have refused to enter into agreements with private ambulance companies without exempt plates. This bill seeks to resolve this obstacle by clarifying that instead of an exempt plate a private ambulance can also seek

authorized emergency vehicle status from the CHP, as is routinely done by private ambulances today.

Toll exemption via agreement? Not so fast. AB 254 also authorized a local emergency service provider (a term which was not defined) to enter into an agreement, under mutually agreeable terms, with a toll operator to use a toll facility and be exempt from tolls. It is unclear if the Legislature intended this option to be mutually exclusive—the legislative history reflects reasonable interpretations either way—but this bill makes clear that it is one of two options for a private ambulance company to obtain an exemption.

AB 902 (Rodriguez), Chapter 124, Statutes of 2023, sponsored by the California Ambulance Association, added the words “public or private” preceding “local emergency service provider, to ensure a private ambulance operator could also enter into an agreement with a toll operator. However, very few agreements exist today because, according to the author and as mentioned above, a private ambulance cannot legally secure an exempt license plate. Some toll operators (e.g., Bay Area Toll Authority) have cited this requirement or have interpreted “mutually agreeable terms” as reasons not to negotiate an agreement with private ambulances. This committee is only aware of one executed agreement between the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority and private ambulances.

Adding to this morass, the California Toll Operators Committee, a statewide oversight and standards committee for toll operators, published a one-page document last year entitled “Private Ambulance Toll Exemption Process”, which summarizes the steps for a private ambulance to enter into an agreement with toll operators. While recognizing that each toll operator may have “its own process for managing toll transactions for emergency vehicles”, it implies that there are no legal obstacles to negotiating agreements.

Committee comments. This bill is the fourth piece of legislation in five years to attempt to address exempting private ambulances from tolls. The committee desires all parties to faithfully implement the intent of the Legislature to exempt private ambulances from tolls under either pathway described above.

A number of private ambulance companies write in support. “The private ambulance industry plays a significant role in California’s pre-hospital care system. Roughly 74% of ambulances in California are operated by private providers. Recently, the private ambulance industry has been hurting from growing financial burdens, including a Medi-Cal reimbursement rate that has not been increased in over two decades, as well as ever-increasing costs related to equipment, fuel, and operations. This bill would help alleviate these burdens by granting private ambulances the same toll exemption privileges as public ambulances.”

Previous legislation. AB 1114 (Avila Farias), Chapter 87, Statutes of 2025 included in the exemption from tolls or charges an authorized emergency vehicle displaying an exempt license plate and the word “Ambulance.”

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.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

Amwest Ambulance
Desert Ambulance Service
Falck USA, Inc.
Lifewest Ambulance
Maxcare Ambulance
NorCal Ambulance

Opposition

None on file

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