Date of Hearing: June 22, 2026

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION
Lori D. Wilson, Chair
SB 1246 (Cortese) – As Amended May 18, 2026

SENATE VOTE: 27-9

SUBJECT: Autonomous vehicles

SUMMARY: Imposes new requirements on autonomous vehicle (AV) manufacturers and autonomous passenger service vehicles pertaining to remote assistants, drivers, and local incident technicians, and further provides requirements pertaining to emergency response procedures, manual override systems, data management, as specified. Specifically, **this bill**:

1) Makes findings and declarations pertaining to protecting public safety for Californians as the operation of AVs continues to grow throughout the state.

2) For provisions specified in this bill, provides various definitions relating to emergency response, remote operations, local incident technicians.

3) Requires remote assistants, remote drivers, or local incident technicians, as defined, who monitor, direct, provide input to, advise, supervise, or control commercial autonomous vehicles on a public road in this state, or that provides onsite response to incidents on behalf of an autonomous vehicle manufacturer, be located within the United States and hold a valid California driver's license of the appropriate class with any endorsements required for a human driver to lawfully operate the same vehicle within the state.

4) For autonomous passenger service vehicles, requires the ratio of remote assistants or remote drivers to autonomous passenger service vehicles be one to five or greater at all times.

5) Requires an AV manufacturer to ensure through its staffing and assignments that remote drivers or remote assistants are immediately dispatched in either of the following situations:

    a) Upon notification, as specified, of an accident involving damage to persons or property; or,
    b) Upon receiving a request from a emergency response officials or 911 dispatch center.

6) Requires the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) to adopt regulations establishing maximum response times for local incident technicians to be present at the scene upon notification or request by January 1, 2028.

7) Requires an autonomous vehicle manufacturer to adopt and maintain written emergency response and immobilization procedures to ensure prompt responses to emergencies and accidents.

8) Requires any commercial autonomous vehicle obstructing a travel lane, crosswalk, intersection, transit lane, bicycle lane, freight corridor, emergency access route, space or ramp designated for disabled persons when not carrying a disabled passenger, or fire hydrant to be relocated or removed as soon as possible, but in no case later than 5 minutes after the

obstruction is detected if the AV is driveable, or no later than 30 minutes after the obstruction is detected if field personnel or towing is required, except as specified.

9) Prohibits a commercial autonomous vehicle from interfering with emergency events, emergency operations, or law enforcement operations.

10) Requires any commercial autonomous vehicle operated without a human driver on a highway in this state to be equipped with a manual override system in the vehicle that allows local incident technicians, emergency response officials, tow operators, and trained personnel to safely disable vehicles, place vehicles in neutral gear to relocate the vehicle during an emergency, and turn off vehicles.

11) Requires an AV manufacturer to provide manual override training and written guidance to local incident responders, emergency response officials, and towing providers regarding the manual override system, including safe disabling, relocation, and communication procedures.

12) Requires the Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST) to develop uniform guidelines and requirements for the manual override training and written guidance required to be provided by autonomous vehicle operators. Authorizes POST to charge a fee sufficient to cover the reasonable regulatory costs associated with administering this section.

13) Requires the California Highway Patrol (CHP) to establish a process to review and approve manual override systems and manual override training and authorizes CHP to charge AV manufacturers a fee sufficient to cover reasonable regulator costs associated with administering this section.

14) Requires AV manufacturers to maintain specified data, including, among other things, information regarding assignments and staffing for remote assistants, remote drivers, and local incident technicians and response times and responses to emergency events, immobilizations, obstructions, accidents involving damage to persons or property, and requests from emergency response officials.

15) Requires AV manufacturers to provide summary statistics showing the number of incidents in which manual control of commercial AVs was necessary, or control was exercised by remote assistants, remote drivers, or local incident technicians on a monthly basis to DMV and CPUC, as specified. Further requires DMV and CPUC to post the summary statistics on their respective internet websites.

16) Specifies that a violation of the above provisions are not crimes and would instead make violations of these provisions subject to specified civil penalties from $1,000 to $10,000 for obstructing vehicles.

17) Requires POST to implement a course or courses of instruction for voluntary training of law enforcement officers on commercial AVs.

EXISTING LAW:

1) Authorizes the operation of AVs on public roads for testing purposes under certain circumstances and as provided in the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) regulations. (Vehicle Code section (VEH) 38750(b) & (d).)

2) Defines “autonomous vehicle” to mean a vehicle equipped with technology that makes it capable of operation that meets the definition of Levels 3, 4, or 5 of the Society of Automotive Engineers (SAE) International's Taxonomy and Testing of Autonomous Vehicles Definitions for Terms Related to Driving Automation Systems for On-Road Motor Vehicles, standard J3016 (APR 2021). (VEH 38750(a)(2).)

3) Defines “autonomous technology” to mean technology that has the capability to drive a vehicle without the active physical control or monitoring by a human operator. (VEH 38750(a)(1).)

4) Prohibits the operation of AVs on public roads for non-testing purposes unless the manufacturer of the vehicles submits an application to the DMV that is approved pursuant to DMV regulations. (VEH 38750(c).)

5) Requires the DMV to approve an application submitted by a manufacturer for the operation of AVs for non-testing purposes if the DMV finds that the applicant has submitted all information and completed testing necessary to satisfy that the AVs are safe to operate on public roads and the applicant has complied with all requirements specified in regulations. (VEH 38750(e).)

6) Commencing July 1, 2026, requires manufacturers of AVs that operate without a human operator physically present in the vehicle, except as provided, to comply with certain requirements, including, among other things, to maintain a dedicated emergency response telephone line that is available for emergency response officials, as defined, and to equip each autonomous vehicle with a two-way voice communication device that enables emergency response officials that are near the vehicle to communicate effectively with a remote human operator, as specified. (VEH 38750(i).)

FISCAL EFFECT: Unknown

COMMENTS: In 2012, the Legislature passed SB 1298 (Padilla), Chapter 570, permitting AVs to operate on public roads for testing by a driver under certain conditions. Two years later, in 2014, DMV released regulations enabling AVs to be tested with a test driver. Subsequently, in April 2018, DMV finalized regulations for both testing and deploying AVs on public roads without a driver.

Thirty-six companies currently have a permit to test with a driver (down from a high of 58), and six companies have received a permit to test without a driver. Three companies have received a deployment permit without a human driver. One company has a deployment permit for a level three AV, which requires a human operator. One or two companies currently have a deployment permit. One company, Cruise, has lost both its deployment permit and its permit to test without a human operator.

On April 28, 2026, DMV updated its AV regulations, providing additional oversight and enforcement for AVs while also permitting heavy-duty AVs with a gross vehicle weight rating (GVWR) over 10,001 pounds to operate on California roads with a testing and deployment permit. These changes are the most significant update to the DMV’s AV regulations since the DMV first permitted driverless testing and deployment on April 2, 2018.

California has been the epicenter of the testing and deployment of AVs. AV permit holders in California logged more than 9 million test miles between December 1, 2024, and November 30, 2025. Nearly half (4.192 million) of those miles were driverless testing miles. Waymo, the only AV company with a deployment permit, drove a total of 61.5 million miles between 2023 and the third quarter of 2025, including 32.3 million miles with passengers. As of September of 2025, Waymo has made over a million passenger trips a month in California, carrying 1.37 million passengers.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) requires AV companies to report crashes to NHTSA. In the last 12 months, AV companies have reported 927 crashes. Since NHTSA began collecting data on AVs in 2021, only 218 injury-related crashes and two fatalities have been reported to NHTSA. 183 of the 218 injury-related crashes were minor injuries, while only seven were serious. Most crashes occurred in California (1,352), Arizona (435), and Texas (237). All other states reported double-digit, single-digit, or no collisions, indicating that AVs are primarily operated in three states.

According to the *Analysis of pre-crash scenarios and contributing factors for autonomous vehicle crashes at intersections*, Accident Analysis & Prevention, 58% of AV crashes reported to California DMV from 2018 to 2022 were rear-end collisions.

The manufacturer is permitted to request lifting the operational restriction by submitting data to the department describing how the deficiencies precipitating the restrictions have been addressed.

Vehicle immobilization. In January 2023, the San Francisco County Transportation Authority asked the California Public Utilities Commission to reject Waymo's request to allow commercial deployment throughout the city. The letter notes a series of 9-1-1 calls that the city had received noting AVs causing traffic obstructions and backups and erratic driving. The duration of unplanned AV stops obstructing travel lanes appeared to range from minutes (extending through many traffic light cycles) to hours. Additional incidents were posted on social media or reported by the media. The number of reported incidents is likely a fraction of the total unplanned stops because most are reported during late night hours when few people are on the streets to notice them and because many people would not think to call 9-1-1 in these circumstances. The AV failure incidents the public has reported have been significantly concentrated on downtown streets, streets with transit service, streets on the bike network, intersections, and streets on the City's High Injury Network (the 12% of San Francisco streets that account for more than 68% of severe or fatal injury crashes)."

On December 20, 2025, a blackout in San Francisco resulted in Waymo's fleet stopping 1,593 times for two minutes or more. Dispatchers called Waymo 31 times to get vehicles moved, and one call was left on hold for 53 minutes. San Francisco Mayor Lurie ultimately contacted the CEO of Waymo personally to demand the robotaxis be removed from city streets.

Vehicle immobilization incidents have resulted in major changes to DMV regulations and were the driving force behind AB 1777 (Ting, Ch. 682, Stats. 2024), which required better communication with emergency responders. Starting July 1, 2026, autonomous vehicles will be required to have a dedicated emergency response telephone line available for emergency response officials during all hours when the autonomous vehicle is on a public road. The dedicated emergency response telephone line must be equipped and staffed to ensure calls are picked up within 30 seconds by remote operations support personnel who have situational

awareness of the autonomous vehicle. There must be a two-way voice communication device that enables emergency response officials who are near the vehicle to communicate effectively with remote operations support that has situational awareness. Emergency response must be able to reach the remote operations support personnel within 30 seconds.

This bill goes a step further and requires AVs to have a manual override system that allows emergency responders to disable the vehicle and place it in neutral so emergency responders can easily push the vehicle away. Waymo vehicles already have a manual override system built in place, while Zoox, which is manufacturing purpose-built AVs in Fremont, California, lacks a steering wheel that could be used as a manual override system.

In addition, the bill establishes a 1:5 staffing ratio for remote drivers/assistants. Currently, Waymo has approximately 70 remote assistance operators on duty at any given time to support its fleet of 3,000 vehicles. While Waymo has a fleet of 3,000 vehicles, it is unclear how many of them are operating at any given time. According to the report, *Overloaded, underloaded or in control: How many automated vehicles can one person supervise?* Researchers Bogg and Birrell found that the optimal number of automated vehicles an individual can effectively supervise is between five and seven. By isolating the purely observational task of remote monitoring from direct intervention or remote driving, the researchers discovered that a supervisor's situation awareness and decision-making efficacy peak when managing five vehicles, with the cognitive capacity to handle temporary surges of up to nine vehicles before experiencing significant performance degradation or missing interventions. Conversely, the study revealed that underloading a supervisor with as few as three vehicles results in a tendency toward micro-management, causing operators to misidentify normal driving behaviors as anomalies and unnecessarily escalate control handovers.

The Autonomous Vehicle Industry Association contends that the Legislature should not establish staffing ratios in statute and should wait to see how DMV regulations requiring an emergency response official to be able to reach remote operations support personnel within 30 seconds play out.

Under the 2018 regulations, the only action DMV could take against a company that failed to comply with DMV regulations was to suspend or revoke its permit to operate. The new regulations provide DMV with incremental enforcement measures, including operational restrictions that include, but are not limited to:

1) Reduction in the daily fleet in an area determined by the department or any portion of the operational design domain.

2) Reduction in operational design domain (e.g., geographic area of operation, road type, weather, etc.).

3) Reduction in hours of operation.

4) Requirement that an autonomous vehicle test driver or support personnel be present in the vehicle under certain conditions.

DMV regulations also established the ability for local authorities to issue a notice of noncompliance against an AV manufacturer for violations of the rules of the road. Violations could result in DMV action being taken against them.

Under this bill, local authorities would additionally be given the authority to issue $1,000 civil penalties against a per drivable commercial AV for obstruction lasting more than 5 minutes, $30,00 for a violation lasting more than 30 minutes, and $10,000 for an obstruction that interferes with emergency events, emergency operations, or law enforcement operations. In addition, a $5,000 civil violation can be issued for failing to maintain staffing ratios, not having remote driver's with a California driver's license, registering drivers in the pull notice program, or failing to immediately dispatching a local incident technician when requested by a first responder or 911 dispatch center or upon notification of an accident involving damage to persons or property, or responding to the incident in a maximum time established by DMV.

Data reporting. Under the new regulations, crash data is required to be submitted to the DMV regardless of the permit type and in the same format as required by the federal government. If the federal government revokes its requirement to report crash data, AV companies will still be required to submit the crash report using the same format. AVs are required to report vehicle immobilization data, braking events, dynamic driving task performance system failures, and total vehicle miles traveled. These reports will be required for vehicles with a testing or deployment permit, except for the breaking events, which must only be reported for vehicles with a testing permit.

This bill duplicates much of the same data requirements established under the new DMV regulations. In addition, it requires AVs to report response times, incidents where manual control was utilized, and requires the information to be reported to DMV on a monthly basis.

According to the author, "Autonomous vehicles (AV) are operating on California's roads every day. When these vehicles stall in our streets, they do not just block traffic or public transit - they also interfere with emergency response officials and other emergency operations. Currently, AV remote manufacturers are not required to have a California driver's license and are responsible for dozens of vehicles at a time. Our firefighters, law enforcement, and emergency response officials cannot afford to wait on understaffed remote manufacturers to respond to dynamic situations. SB 1246 puts common-sense standards in place to ensure AV companies act quickly, trained personnel are accountable, and our emergency response officials have the resources they need to keep the public safe."

SEIU, the *sponsor of this bill*, writes, "Autonomous vehicle use is rapidly proliferating in California, and like any new technology, there are unanticipated consequences. On December 20, 2025, a single power outage in San Francisco caused over 1,500 AV stoppages, resulted in AVs blocking fire trucks and ambulances responding to emergencies, required the Mayor of San Francisco to personally contact the AV company's CEO to get the AVs cleared, and overwhelmed AV companies' first responder hotlines, with some emergency services staff placed on hold for 53 minutes. These events made clear that current operations and the corresponding regulatory framework are inadequate for the scale of AV deployment already underway. Other concerning incidents have involved AVs driving through active police standoffs, illegally passing school buses, driving over fire hoses, and hitting and injuring children….Autonomous vehicles are on the roads across California, and like any new technology the impacts are felt at the local level first. We urge the legislature to pass these common-sense safety standards, which will ease the burden on local government resources and ensure first responders are not delayed when we need them the most."

The Autonomous Vehicle Industry Association, writing in opposition to this bill, argues "This bill would directly conflict with statutory and regulatory obligations poised to take effect this year. Rather than rushing through this bill, the Legislature should allow these new rules, which were adopted with thorough broad stakeholder engagement, to take effect before considering additional mandates that would disrupt implementation.

"SB 1246 addresses complex issues with no equivalence anywhere else in the United States and does so against the backdrop of ongoing regulatory efforts at the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) and the near-term implementation of new requirements that address topics regulated by this bill.

'Finally, SB 1246 fails to recognize the immense stakeholder engagement the AV industry has done in California, most notably with the law enforcement and first responder communities. This engagement and daily communication is wedded to the fabric of the AV industry. The industry has devoted significant resources to training California's law enforcement and first responders about AV technology and providing ongoing information to ensure the vehicles are safely integrated into California's communities."

Committee concerns. Some provisions of this bill are duplicative of existing DMV regulations or set impracticable standards for AV companies. New DMV regulations already require AV companies to report vehicle immobilizations. While DMV does not require reporting on the number of times manual control was necessary, DMV does require dynamic driving task system failures, which are events that would ultimately require manual control**.** DMV regulations already require law enforcement interaction plans as required in this bill.

Setting a maximum amount of time for a technician to respond in person to an incident is unreasonable and effectively sets an AV company up for failure because it is simply too difficult to ascertain road conditions under every scenario. Traffic is unpredictable. In 2023, 194,547 police-reported crashes occurred across the state. These crashes can greatly impact travel time. According to the INTRIX Traffic Scorecard, drivers in Los Angeles lost an average of 87 hours in traffic congestion over the course of the year. Allowing local authorities to issue $1,000 citations if an AV is stalled out for 5 minutes without a technician on the scene of a vehicle immobilization incident is unrealistic in any urban area across the state. At the same time, the committee recognizes the concerns regarding AVs that are immobilized and interfering with an active emergency.

Some provisions in this bill may be preempted by federal law. The Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Act generally preempts states from requiring motor vehicle safety standards for vehicles that are inconsistent with federal standards. Requiring the CHP to come up with design parameters for a manual override system is unusual as this is more in the purview of the federal government.

The U.S. Supreme Court has generally been skeptical of state laws placing residency requirements for employment. In order to get a California Driver's license, you need to establish residency in the state. The requirement for all remote operators and assistants to have a California driver's license would preclude Americans outside of this state from employment by AV companies that operate in the state. Further, remote assistants do not perform any dynamic driving task and therefore should not require a driver's license issued in the United States. SEIU continues to assert that because AVs are replacing human operators in the United States all the

new jobs AV companies create, including remote assistants, should be located in the United States.

While research suggests AV companies should have a 1-5 ratio for remote assistants to vehicles, the same research suggests that higher ratios are still safe. In addition, the operations of AVs will continue to improve over time and locking into a specific staffing ratio in state law based on vehicles being tested today is unreasonable. Ultimately, a $5,000 penalty for not adhering to a staffing ratio is overly burdensome on such a new industry. The latest DMV regulations require AV companies to respond to a call from emergency responders in 30 seconds, and the committee should consider waiting to see how the AV industry complies with that regulation before imposing strict staffing ratios.

Therefore, the committee recommends the following amendments:

1) Strike the provision requiring staffing ratios and the corresponding language in the findings and declarations.
2) Remove the requirement for remote assistants, remote driver's and local incident Technicians to have a California Driver's license and instead require remote drivers and local incident technicians to have a driver's license issued in the United States and strike the provision requiring the participation in the pull notice program.
3) *Add the following language to VEH 38801: (b) In the event of a fleet-wide emergency or system failure, an autonomous vehicle manufacturer shall immediately notify affected local jurisdictions including emergency dispatch of the location and status of their fleet, and deploy local incident technicians, where appropriate, whenever affected vehicles cannot be remotely recovered and create a traffic hazard or impede emergency response.*

4) Strike VEH 33802(a)(3) and (b)(1) and (2)
5) Strike VEH 33803.
6) Strike VEH 38804(b) and (c)
7) Strike VEH 38806(a)(1-5) and (c)
8) Strike VEH 33807 (b)(1,2). And modify the language in (3) to the following: Ten thousand dollars ($10,000) per commercial autonomous vehicle for an obstruction during, or that otherwise causes interference with, emergency events, emergency operations, or law enforcement operations *for more than 30 minutes from the moment an emergency response official requested a local incident technician.*
9) Add VEH 38808**:** *The department shall adopt guidelines establishing reasonable response times for local incident technicians to be present at the scene of an incident where an emergency response official requested a local incident technician under section 22802(a)(2).*
10) Modify VEH 38804. (a) Any commercial autonomous vehicle operated without a human driver on a highway in this state, *that is equipped with controls that allow someone physically present to drive the vehicle*, shall be equipped with a manual override system in the vehicle that allows local incident technicians, emergency response officials, tow operators, and trained personnel to readily and safely disable the vehicle, place the vehicle in neutral gear to relocate it during an emergency, and turn off the vehicle.
(1)Manufacturers of any commercial autonomous vehicle that is not equipped with manual controls for completing the dynamic driving task, such as a steering wheel, brake pedal, and accelerator pedal, shall ensure that remote assistants or remote driver have the ability to either place an autonomous vehicle in neutral to allow an emergency response

official to move the autonomous vehicle, ~~or~~ to cause the autonomous vehicle to move as directed by an emergency response official, or turn off the vehicle and have it remain stationary until otherwise directed by an emergency response official.
(2) In the event that a commercial autonomous vehicle is unable to be relocated pursuant to paragraph (1), the manufacturer shall immediately dispatch either a local incident technician pursuant to subdivision (b) of Section 38802 or a tow operator as requested by an emergency response official to safely disable, relocate, and turn off the vehicle.

In addition, Assembly Judiciary Committee has asked for the following amendments to be taken in this committee:

38807. A violation of this chapter is not a crime and subject to the following civil penalties *brought in a action in a court of competent jurisdiction ~~and administrative actions~~*

a) ~~A city, county, or city and county~~ *A City Attorney or County Counsel* may impose a civil penalty of five thousand dollars ($5,000) for each violation of Section 38801, Section 38802, the autonomous vehicle *manufacturers'* permit, or any regulation authorizing the autonomous vehicle*manufacturers'* operations. Penalties shall be payable to the jurisdiction enforcing the violation.

(b) A ~~city, county, or city and county~~ *A city Attorney or County Counsel* may impose the following civil penalties *on autonomous vehicle manufacturers* for *the following* violation~~s of Section 38803.~~

Related and previous legislation. AB 33 (Aguiar-Curry) of 2025 prohibits an AV without a human operator from delivering commercial goods directly to a residence or to a business for its use or retail sale. AB 33 is currently on the Senate Inactive File on the Senate Floor.

AB 2286 (Aguiar-Curry) of 2024 would have restricted an AV with a gross vehicle weight (GVW) of 10,001 pounds or more from being operated on public roads for testing purposes, transporting goods, or transporting passengers without a human safety operator physically present in the AV at the time of operation. This bill was vetoed by Governor Newsom.

AB 3061 (Haney) of 2024 would have required the manufacturers of AVs to report to DMV any vehicle collision, traffic violation, or disengagement, or the assault or harassment of any passenger or safety driver that involves a manufacturer's vehicle in California starting July 31, 2025. This bill was vetoed by Governor Newsom.

SB 915 (Cortese) of 2024 would have required local authorization for an AV commercial passenger service to operate within its limits. SB 915 was held in the Assembly Transportation Committee.

AB 1777 (Ting) Chapter 682, Statutes of 2024) placed a variety of safety requirements on manufactures of AVs by July 1, 2026, and further authorized a peace officer to issue a "notice of autonomous vehicle noncompliance" for a violation of the Vehicle Code or a local traffic ordinance to an AV manufacturer.

AB 96 (Kalra) Chapter 419, Statutes of 2023 required a public transit employer to provide written notice to an exclusive representative of the workforce affected by autonomous transit

vehicle technology, and that collective bargaining commence within a certain timeframe, among other provisions.

AB 316 (Aguiar-Curry) of 2023 was substantially similar to AB 2286. This bill was vetoed by Governor Newsom.

SB 1298 (Padilla) Chapter 570, Statutes 2012 established conditions for the operation of AVs upon public roadways.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

California Association of Highway Patrolmen
California Conference Board of the Amalgamated Transit Union
California Federation of Labor Unions, AFL-CIO
California Professional Firefighters
California Safety and Legislative Board, Smart – Transportation Division (smart – Td)
California School Employees Association
SEIU California
Teamsters California

Opposition

Abate-a-Weed
Alliance for Automotive Innovation
Aurora Innovation
Autonomous Vehicle Industry Association
AVRS Group
Bay Area Council
Bot Auto
Cal-Asian Chamber of Commerce
Cal Chamber
California Alliance for Freight Innovation
California Manufacturers & Technology Association
California Manufacturers and Technology Association
Chamber of Progress
Einride
Flasher Barricade Association
Gatik
Honda
International Motors
Kodiak Robotics
Moia America
National Federation of Independent Business
Nuro
Palo Alto Chamber of Commerce
Plus Ai
SF.Citi
Silicon Valley Leadership Group

Stack AV
Technet
Tesla
Tier IV
Torc
Truck and Engine Manufacturers Association
United Spinal Association
Valley Industry and Commerce Association
Volvo Group North America
Waabi
Zoox

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