

Date of Hearing: July 5, 2023

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION

Laura Friedman, Chair

SB 775 (Padilla) – As Amended June 28, 2023

SENATE VOTE: 40-0

SUBJECT: Vehicles: electric schoolbuses: signage

SUMMARY: Authorizes a school district, county office of education or charter school using an electric schoolbus to transport students at or below the 12th-grade level to place signage on the rear of the electric schoolbus that identifies the schoolbus as a clean air zero-emission bus.

Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Authorizes the Department of the California Highway Patrol (CHP) to issue guidelines governing the size and placement of zero-emission schoolbus signage.
- 2) Allows for the signage to identify the specific type of zero emission fuel.

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) Authorizes CHP to adopt reasonable rules and regulations, which in the judgment of the department, are designed to promote the safe operation of schoolbuses, with the advisement of an 11 member committee. (Vehicle Code Section (VEH) 34501.5)
- 2) Authorizes CHP to adopt and enforce rules and regulations related to the equipment, maintenance, construction, design, color, and operations of schoolbuses. (VEH 34508)
- 3) Requires the words “SCHOOL BUS” or “SCHOOLBUS” to be displayed on the back of the bus as well as the words “Stop When Red Lights Flash.” (VEH 27906)

Existing regulations:

- 1) Permit small exterior tabs or labels with lettering of nor more than one inch in height indicating operational information, such as, but not limited to, the type of fuel used on school buses. (California Code of Regulations Title 13, section 1256.5 (13 CCR 1256.5))
- 2) Permits additional signs consisting of special identification to be displayed so long as they are a maximum of 12 inches by 12 inches on the sides of a school bus below the bottom edge of the passengers’ side window glass and not closer than 12 inches from any required sign. (13 CCR 1256.5).

FISCAL EFFECT:

According to Senate Appropriations Committee, CHP estimates one-time costs in the range of \$50,000 to \$100,000 to amend schoolbus regulations to include specification of the size and placement of signage identifying a schoolbus as a clean air electric bus. (Motor Vehicle Account)

COMMENTS: CHP places strict limits on what signage is permitted on a schoolbus. Signage on the rear of the school bus is dictated by statute for safety purposes. Specifically, the rear of a schoolbus must indicate that it is a schoolbus and have signage indicating that drivers have to stop when the red light flashes. CHP regulations permit in small letters by one inch an indication of the type of fuel that is used in the vehicle. Schoolbuses may also have additional signage for special identification to be displayed, so long as they meet specified height requirements. Schoolbuses can also have the company logo on the bus.

According to the author, “Clear labeling of electric schoolbuses allows communities to see the impact of their hard-earned tax dollars as we replace our aging diesel fleet. Identifying our electric schoolbuses not only gives families the peace of mind that their children are not being exposed to further exhaust fumes, but also highlights our important work as we transition from fossil fuels to a carbon-free future.”

The Hybrid and Zero-Emission Truck and Bus Voucher Incentive Project (HVIP) has set aside \$122 million in 2022 to cover the purchase of electric schoolbuses. More recently, the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act provides \$5 billion for the United States Environmental Protection Agency’s new Clean School Bus Program for fiscal years 2022-2026 to replace existing school buses with zero-emission and low-emission models. Of the \$919 million awarded in 2022, California received \$67 million for the purchase of 174 electric school buses.

San Diego Unified School District, writing in support of this bill, argues “San Diego Unified has begun transitioning to electric schoolbuses with the launch of our Clean Mobility in Schools Pilot Program, which was made possible by a grant from the California Air Resources Board. There is clear evidence that clean transportation positively impacts health by reducing exposure to toxic diesel fumes which lead to increased risk of asthma, cancer, and other health conditions. With the cost of electric schoolbuses approximately three times greater than diesel buses, state grant funding has been critical to support the purchase of electric buses that improve public health by bringing cutting edge clean transportation technology to schools in communities disproportionately impacted by poor air quality. San Diego Unified currently has thirteen electric schoolbuses, which are identified by a green bumper. Current regulations restrict the use of other signage on schoolbuses that would readily identify them as clean air vehicles.

SB 775 (Padilla) would allow school districts to apply signage on the rear of electric schoolbuses to identify them as clean air vehicles. This bill would grant the California Highway Patrol the authority and discretion to determine the appropriate size and placement of this signage to ensure safety.”

Committee concerns: The Motor Vehicle Account (MVA), the primary funding source for CHP, remains structurally imbalanced. Although the MVA is projected to have a positive fund balance through the next three fiscal years, in 2023-24, 2024-25, 2025-26, expenditures are anticipated to outpace revenues, reducing the fund balance from \$515 million in 2021-22 to \$10 million in 2025-26. The structural imbalance remains even though all future Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) and CHP capital outlay costs are being shifted away from the MVA to the General Fund in an attempt to keep the fund solvent. By 2026-2027, the MVA is projected to run a \$314 million deficit. CHP would need to use its regulatory process to implement this bill resulting in increased state costs that would be paid for out of the MVA.

San Diego Unified School District's electric school buses have already indicated in several ways that the bus is electric. As permitted, there is lettering on the side of their vehicles indicating the bus is electric. In addition, the company logo for the bus indicates the bus is electric. Finally, the school buses have painted their bumpers green instead of blue to indicate the buses are electric.

The Legislature should consider if allowing a rear sign on a schoolbus, which has typically been reserved for sharing information on compliance with the law requiring drivers to stop when a flashing light is indicated to protect students, is worth opening up a regulatory process for when other identifiers on a bus indicating it is electric or another fuel type are already permitted.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:**Support**

Coalition for Clean Air
San Diego County Office of Education
San Diego Unified School District
Sweetwater Union High School District

Opposition

None on file

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