

Date of Hearing: April 18, 2016

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION

Jim Frazier, Chair

AB 2542 (Gatto) – As Amended March 15, 2016

**SUBJECT:** Streets and highways: reversible lanes

**SUMMARY:** Requires that, prior to the California Transportation Commission (CTC) approving a capacity-increasing project or major street or highway lane realignment project, the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) or a regional transportation planning agency must demonstrate that reversible lanes were considered for the project.

**EXISTING LAW:**

- 1) Vests CTC with responsibility to advise and assist the Secretary of the California State Transportation Agency and the Legislature in formulating and evaluating state policies and plans for California's transportation programs.
- 2) Requires the CTC to, among other things, adopt the state transportation improvement program and allocate transportation capital funds to specific projects in the program, for each major phase of a project.
- 3) Declares that it is the policy of the state that public agencies should not approve projects as proposed if there are feasible alternatives or feasible mitigation measures available which would substantially lessen the significant environmental effects of such projects.

**FISCAL EFFECT:** Unknown

**COMMENTS:** Reversible lanes add peak-direction capacity to a two-way road and decrease congestion by "borrowing" available lane capacity from the other (off-peak) direction. The lanes are particularly beneficial where the cost to increase capacity is especially expensive, like on bridges and in dense urban areas.

Reversible lanes are not new to California. In fact, reversible lanes were first inaugurated on the Golden Gate Bridge in October 1963. While they worked to reduce serve traffic in the peak direction, they were labor intensive to operate and posed serious safety problems because they led to the increase in head-on collisions. Now the lanes are adjusted with the aid of a "zipper"—a moveable barrier machine that pushes a heavy concrete and metal barrier across one lane and related labor and safety problems have been minimized.

Today, in addition to the Golden Gate Bridge, reversible lanes are used on the San Diego-Coronado Bridge, Interstate 15 in San Diego, and, until recently, in the Caldecott Tunnel. Furthermore, the use of reversible lanes is increasing, for example, during large sporting events, traffic incidents, construction, and evacuations.

According to the Texas A&M Transportation Institute (Institute), the decision to consider reversible lanes is usually based on the need to mitigate recurrent congestion. Its use is most applicable on multi-lane roadways with a directional imbalance in excess of 65/35% with a predominance of through traffic and predictable congestion patterns. Reasons agencies give for

using reversible lanes include: congestion mitigation, queue length, the need to decrease travel time, and the need to improve the overall corridor level of service.

The Institute asserts that planning of specific reversible facilities does not differ substantially from conventional facilities. It also suggests that "[t]he vast majority of reversible lanes are implemented on lanes not originally planned or designed for bi-directional use. Most reversible lanes are incorporated into conventionally designed roadways that were later reconfigured for permanent or periodic flow conversions using various permanent or temporary design and control features. The exceptions to this case are applications on freeways, in particular freeway high occupancy vehicle (HOV) and transit reversible lanes, where transition termini and lane separations are planned, designed, and constructed specifically for the purpose of a reversible lane."

Caltrans already provides guidance regarding consideration for the use of reversible lanes. Consequently, AB 2542 should be relatively easy to implement. Furthermore, given the potential benefits of avoiding costly, environmentally unfriendly roadway expansion, the requirements set forth in AB 2542 to consider reversible lanes seem reasonable.

*Committee comment:* AB 2542 does not prescribe the manner by which Caltrans or a regional transportation planning agency would demonstrate that reversible lanes were considered. Nor does it define the process within which CTC would be approving a capacity-adding project. The author may want to work with the CTC to clarify how provisions of AB 2542 would be operationalized, for example, by requiring that a reversible lane alternative be considered in the alternative analysis portion of an environmental review document.

*Previous legislation:* AB 1283 (DeVore) of 2005 would have required Caltrans, prior to adding single-direction lanes, to study the feasibility of adding reversible lanes separated by barriers. AB 1283 failed passage in this committee by a vote of 6-5.

## **REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:**

### **Support**

None on file

### **Opposition**

None on file

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