

Date of Hearing: April 28, 2025

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION
Lori D. Wilson, Chair
AB 1145 (Jeff Gonzalez) – As Amended April 21, 2025

SUBJECT: State highways: safety: report

SUMMARY: Requires the Department of Transportation (Caltrans) to conduct a study on highway safety on the state highway system on or before December 31, 2027. Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Requires the Caltrans study to collect all available data, disaggregated by state highway, over the preceding 10 years, including, but not limited to, all of the following data:
 - a) The number of accidents, including fatal and nonfatal accidents;
 - b) The number of 911 calls related to tire blowouts due to potholes and otherwise poor road conditions;
 - c) The number of incidents involving truck tractors;
 - d) The number and types of citations issued for violations of the Vehicle Code, including, but not limited to, weight-limit violations;
 - e) The number of injuries and fatalities;
 - f) The number of instances in which an accident was caused by brake failure; and,
 - g) All of the following relating to enforcement facilities:
 - i. The identification of transportation corridors used to bypass enforcement facilities;
 - ii. The resulting dangers, hazards, poor conditions, and other consequences of the transportation corridors; and,
 - iii. The identification of hot spots on the corridors identified.
- 2) Requires Caltrans to develop recommendations to improve highway safety on the state highway system, including recommendations on how to address enforcement facility bypassing, including but not limited to, recommendations related to increased enforcement, road safety projects, and road maintenance projects.
- 3) Requires Caltrans to report back to the Legislature by December 31, 2027.

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) Assigns Caltrans the responsibility of operating and maintaining state highways. (Streets and Highway Code Section 91)
- 2) Establishes the California Traffic Safety Program (OTS), which consists of a comprehensive plan in conformity with the laws of this state to reduce traffic accidents and deaths, injuries, and property damage resulting from accidents. (Vehicle Code (VEH) Section 2900)
- 3) Requires OTS to provide a detailed presentation and a statement concerning the progress made in implementing the program and recommendations concerning possible legislative action deemed necessary or desirable to implement the program. (VEH 2905)

- 4) Requires every driver of a commercial vehicle to stop and submit the vehicle to an inspection of the vehicle's size, weight, equipment, loading, and smoke emissions, as well as the driver's license, medical qualifications, and hours-of-service compliance of a driver of the vehicle at any location where members of the CHP are conducting inspections of commercial vehicles and when signs are displayed requiring the stop. (VEH 2813)
- 5) Defines a "commercial vehicle" as a motor vehicle of a type required to be registered under this code used or maintained for the transportation of persons for hire, compensation, or profit or designed, used, or maintained primarily for the transportation of property, with certain exemptions. (VEH 260)
- 6) Makes it a misdemeanor if a driver of a vehicle does not stop and submit the vehicle to an inspection when signs are displayed requiring that stop. (VEH 2813)

FISCAL EFFECT: Unknown

COMMENTS: According to OTS, California continues to experience a road safety crisis. Projections from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) estimate more than 4,400 people were killed in motor vehicle crashes throughout California in 2022, or about 12 people every day. Early data from NHTSA for 2023 and 2024 estimates a year over year 5% increase in traffic fatalities. Across the state, traffic fatalities increased approximately 7.6% from 3,980 in 2020 to 4,285 in 2021. The increase of traffic fatalities in recent years led to the creation of the Vision Zero Network—a collaborative campaign with the goal of eliminating all traffic fatalities and severe injuries while increasing safe, healthy, and equitable mobility for all. Today, more than 40 communities (including at least 13 in California) across the country have joined the Vision Zero Network.

In 2022, Caltrans issued a Director's Policy on Road Safety (DP-36) that committed the department to a Safe System approach and reaffirmed the vision of reaching zero fatalities and serious injuries on state highways by 2050. Under the Safe System approach, Caltrans focuses on five elements: safe road users, safe roads, safe speeds, safe vehicles, and post-crash care. As part of the policy, Caltrans committed to prioritizing safety in highway planning, operation, construction, and maintenance, to focus on eliminating the most serious crashes rather than all crashes, and eliminating disparities in road safety outcomes.

In 2023 Caltrans released their Road Safety Action Plan designed to review and track progress towards aligning Caltrans policies and practices with the Safe Systems approach. One step that was taken was to update the safety project prioritization methodology in the federally funded Highway Safety Improvement Program to better prioritize sites with the highest severity of collisions. Other goals planned to be completed by the end of this year include updating statewide planning guidelines to incorporate the Safe System Approach, developing a statewide decision-making framework for proactively identifying and prioritizing roadway safety investment, and developing trainings for project development teams on how to design safer roadways.

According to the author, the CHP operates Commercial Vehicle Enforcement Facilities (CVEF) across the state to inspect the weight of trucks and commercial vehicles and provide safety inspections. There are currently 54 CVEFs in the state plus 76 mini-sites. According to Caltrans, there are three primary reasons for CVEFs: infrastructure preservation, truck operations, and

highway safety. Highway pavement or structure life is affected by the weight and frequency of truck traffic. Heavy trucks cause far greater impact on pavement and bridges compared to passenger cars. A road test sponsored by the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials established that it takes the passage of approximately 9,600 cars to equal the pavement damage caused by one legal truck weighing 80,000 pounds. Studies on pavement damage indicate that a 10% overload increases the pavement damage by as much as 40%. It is imperative to monitor overweight truck traffic to preserve and extend pavement life.

Every four years Caltrans and the California Highway Patrol (CHP) prepare an Inventor of Needs (ION) CVEF report. This report's objectives is to construct new CVEF on highways were now exists, conduct planning, engineering and traffic studies to determine the feasibility of construction/ upgrades, optimize safety, and establish virtual weigh stations.

Last year Governor Newsom vetoed SB 936 (Seyarto), which would have required Caltrans, to study and post it on its website by January 1, 2026, the 15 locations in the state highway system with the highest rate of vehicle collisions and to identify projects that could improve road safety at those locations. In his veto message, the Governor wrote:

“Caltrans is already implementing various initiatives to prioritize road safety improvements, including its Safe System Approach. This innovative approach aims to reduce fatal and serious injuries for all road users by taking a comprehensive view of safety, focusing on multiple layers of protection, from building safer roads to post-crash care. While I support efforts to expedite traffic safety enhancements, this bill conflicts with Caltrans' data-driven approach to identifying and developing a holistic traffic safety framework for its projects. Prioritizing locations based solely on overall collision rates, without considering crash severity and other associated collision factors, may fail to address the areas of greatest safety concern.

Existing safety planning efforts that proactively identify and implement safety projects, such as the California Strategic Highway Safety Plan, can already effectively achieve the goals that this bill seeks to accomplish. I encourage the Legislature to partner with Caltrans to advance the implementation of these efforts.”

Committee comments: Given the veto of SB 936, the author may want to pursue a more focused approach rather than the broad safety study in this bill. The author could consider directing Caltrans to include a section in the next edition of the ION that addresses corridors trucks may be using to bypass CVEF. This section could identify highways commonly used to bypass weigh stations, evaluate any associated safety risks, and explore strategies the state could implement to improve safety on those routes.

Previous legislation: AB 2363 (Friedman), Chapter 650, Statutes of 2018 requires the Secretary of Transportation to establish and convene the Zero Traffic Fatalities Task Force, on or before, July 1, 2019, and prepare and submit a report of findings based on the efforts of this task force by January 1, 2020.

SB 936 (Seyarto) of 2024 would have required the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans), to study and post it on its website by January 1, 2026, the 15 locations in the state highway system with the highest rate of vehicle collisions and to identify projects that could improve road safety at those locations. *That bill was vetoed by Governor Newsom.*

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

Truck Safety Coalition
17 Individuals

Opposition

None on file

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