



SB 635 (Gonzalez) Cleaning California's Roads

SUMMARY

Senate Bill (SB) 635 will attempt to address the root problems causing the buildup of roadside litter and debris on California's roadways by requiring the Department of Transportation (Caltrans), in collaboration with the Office of the Inspector General, to develop a comprehensive assessment on the state's roadside cleanup activities.

SB 635 will also require Caltrans to create an advisory board in coordination with state and local entities that will develop strategies to reach cleanup targets.

EXISTING LAW

As the agency responsible for roadway maintenance, Caltrans oversees the removal of debris along the state's roads and highways. Caltrans both directs employees to clean up sites --nearly 2,000 Caltrans maintenance workers are involved with cleanups-- and oversees volunteer (e.g. Adopt-a-Highway) and community service programs that clean roadways. Caltrans schedules these cleanups based on the frequency that an area has historically needed to be cleaned.

Currently, Caltrans policy is to review and revise these cleanup frequencies when re-contracting each five-year Adopt-a-Highway or community service permit. Caltrans posts these schedules on district route maps or other public formats like mile markers. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, many of these scheduled cleanups have been cancelled to prevent large gatherings.

The COVID-19 pandemic has also required Caltrans to alter protocols for homeless encampment cleanups. Before the pandemic, Caltrans districts could only conduct an encampment cleanup if all people at an encampment had been willingly relocated by local

governments into a shelter. However, additional protocols to promote sheltering in place efforts, released on December 11, 2020, further limited encampment cleanups during the COVID-19 pandemic to only level 1 or level 2 encampments, which threaten roadway infrastructure or pose a safety concern. This policy change is in line with guidance from the Center for Disease Control, which prioritizes keeping individuals housed and re-homing individuals during the COVID-19 pandemic.

BACKGROUND/PROBLEM

Given the limitations of in-person cleanups and changes in policy regarding homeless encampments, COVID-19 has exacerbated the already worsening problem of debris along roadsides.

Accumulated roadside debris can be dangerous to drivers, the environment, and individuals living in homeless encampments. According to a report by the AAA foundation for Traffic Safety, road debris caused over 200,000 auto accidents, including 500 that resulted in deaths, between 2011-2014¹. Furthermore, trash along roadways not only impact local ecosystems, but can also run off into stormwater and pollute marine environments.

Finally, a particularly complex aspect of roadside cleanup involves cleanup of encampments. These encampments are people's homes and property. However, due to poor sanitation concerns, cleanups of encampments are vital to manage the spread of disease and promote the well-being of the homeless population.

¹ <https://aaafoundation.org/prevalence-motor-vehicle-crashes-involving-road-debris-united-states-2011-2014/>

Caltrans is responsible for the maintenance, of approximately 350,000 acres of right of way, 15,133 centerline miles of highways, and 13,063 bridges². In 2019 alone, Caltrans collected 287,000 cubic yards of litter—enough to fill 18,000 garbage trucks³. Thirty five percent of this garbage was cleaned by volunteer programs, which have been suspended due to the pandemic.

At the same time as the pandemic is reducing Caltrans capacity to remove roadway debris, Caltrans has also faced an increased demand on its cleanup resources: in 2017 alone, Caltrans spent an estimated \$10M cleaning up some 7,000 homeless encampments—a 34% increase from the previous year⁴.

SOLUTION

Debris and trash along roadsides and highways poses a serious threat to driver safety, the environment, and individuals experiencing homelessness.

SB 635 seeks to address one of the primary causes of this problem by requiring Caltrans to report on its cleanup activities, establish areas of need, and make recommendations on comprehensive solutions. Further, SB 635 will require Caltrans to collaborate with the Office of the Inspector General and relevant health, state, and local agencies on this assessment and create an advisory board to identify barriers to cleanups and propose strategies to reach cleanup targets.

Lastly, SB 635 requires local Caltrans districts to develop clean-up schedules and post these schedules on their internet website every two weeks

SUPPORT

Bixby Knolls Business Improvement Association
City of Lakewood
City of Long Beach
City of Signal Hill

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² <https://dot.ca.gov/programs/maintenance>

³ <https://dot.ca.gov/news-releases/news-release-2020-014>

⁴ <https://dot.ca.gov/-/media/dot-media/programs/risk-strategic-management/documents/mile-marker/mm-2018-q1-homeless-camps-ally.pdf>