
SENATE COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION AND HOUSING

Senator Jim Beall, Chair

2017 - 2018 Regular

Bill No: AB 533 **Hearing Date:** 6/26/2018
Author: Holden
Version: 6/18/2018 Amended
Urgency: No **Fiscal:** Yes
Consultant: Manny Leon

SUBJECT: State Highway Route 710

DIGEST: This bill removes a specific portion of State Route 710 (SR 710) from the freeway and expressway system, as specified.

ANALYSIS:

Existing law:

- 1) Grants Caltrans the full possession and control of all state highways and all property and rights in property acquired for state highway purposes.
- 2) Provides Caltrans the authority to lay out and construct all state highways between the termini designated by law and on the locations determined by the California Transportation Commission (CTC).
- 3) Designates SR 710 as the highway from SR 1 to SR 210 in Pasadena.
- 4) Statutorily defines the California freeway and expressway system to include designated routes, including SR 710 in its entirety, and defines a freeway as a highway where the owners of abutting lands have no right or easement of access to or from their abutting lands.

This bill:

- 1) Removes a certain portion of SR 710 from the State's freeway or expressway system by January 1, 2024 or when the SR 710 North Project is complete, whichever is sooner.
- 2) Specifies that upon completion of the SR 710 North Project or January 1, 2024, whichever is sooner, portions of SR 710 that are included in the State's freeway and expressway system shall include:

- a) Route 47 to Route 1.
- b) Route 1 to Route 10.
- c) Route 10 in the City of Los Angeles to Valley Boulevard in the City of Alhambra.
- d) California Boulevard in the City of Pasadena to Route 210.

COMMENTS

- 1) *Purpose.* According to the author, “The 710 has divided communities in the San Gabriel Valley for too long. The well-intentioned proposal to build a freeway 50 years ago has led to a neighborhood deteriorating physically and an ongoing feud that has left both sides with the consequences of inaction. Assembly Bill 533 will remove the most disputed section of the SR 710 Freeway and Expressway system. This is in line with a move by the local transportation authority, LA Metro, to stop pursuing the construction of a freeway tunnel and begin pursuing a collaborative, community supported alternative. It removes the possibility of a freeway being built in the future, in order to allow the community to move on. AB 533 will take this controversial option off the table and encourage a solution that is community- led and provides the greatest community benefit.”
- 2) *Background.* For over 50 years, Caltrans has intended to close a roughly five mile unconstructed gap in the freeway by extending SR 710 from Interstate 10 (I-10) in Los Angeles through South Pasadena to I-210 in Pasadena. Currently, SR 710 North ends abruptly just north of I-10, feeding into local traffic on Valley Boulevard in Alhambra and causing congestion on the neighboring freeways. The gap affects the surrounding cities of Alhambra, South Pasadena, Pasadena, and a portion of Los Angeles. The extension project has been in the planning stage since the 1960s but, despite state and eventual federal approval, has been challenged by the community and delayed numerous times for a variety of reasons often related to the environmental review process. In 1998, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) approved the SR 710 freeway extension but a court decision criticizing the environmental review halted construction.
- 3) *Measure R.* In 2008, Los Angeles County passed by a two thirds vote a half cent sales tax to raise additional funds for congestion relief, road repairs, and rail extensions over the course of 30 years. The adopted expenditure plan included \$780 million for the SR 710 North gap closure, intended to go toward a tunnel connector at an estimated total cost of nearly \$4 billion. Shortly after the passage of Measure R, Caltrans began a boring and seismic feasibility study

in the area.

- 4) *Environmental impact report.* In 2015, Caltrans released its draft environmental impact report (EIR) assessing the costs, benefits, and impacts of five alternative projects for the SR 710 gap:
- a) No build — no planned improvements to the SR 710 North Corridor.
 - b) Transportation System Management/Transportation Demand Management (TSM/TDM) operational improvements – strategies and improvements to increase efficiency and capacity for all modes of transportation.
 - c) Bus rapid transit (BRT) – high-speed, high-frequency bus service through a combination of new, dedicated, and existing bus lanes.
 - d) Light rail transit (LRT) – a passenger rail operated along a dedicated guideway, similar to other Metro light rail lines.
 - e) Freeway tunnel with design and operational variants – starts at the existing southern stub of SR 710 in Alhambra, just north of I-10, and connects to the existing northern stub of SR 710.

After the draft report was published, around 8,000 public comments were received with 1,328 specifically supporting the tunnels and 237 opposing the tunnels.

- 5) *A traffic light at the end of the tunnel?* Though the tunnel was a favorable alternative functionally from the draft EIR, financially it was another matter. Measure R only allocated \$780 million for the tunnel project, far short of the \$3 to \$5.5 billion the tunnel could cost. Recognizing this, at a board meeting in May 2017, the Metro Board of Directors approved a motion specifying that the \$780 million from Measure R be put toward local fundable projects for traffic relief. With the motion passing on a 12-0 vote, the Board recommended allocating \$105 million to the TSM/TDM alternative as the Locally Preferred Alternative – a means of obtaining more immediate results via traffic light and intersection improvements, among other fixes for local roads. For a fraction of the cost, the TSM/TDM investment would yield results within a few years, as opposed to at least five years with the tunnel.
- 6) *Work in progress.* Caltrans is expected to finalize the EIR sometime in fall 2018. Caltrans' final EIR report will take into consideration and respond to all the public comments received during the open comment period, as appropriate. However, even if Caltrans were to select the tunnel as its Preferred Alternative, the decision by LA Metro to allocate the Measure R money to other projects

may make funding the tunnels more difficult.

7) *Is this bill necessary?* Presently, SR 710 is included in the freeway and expressway system in its entirety, including the incomplete portion north of I-10 to I-210. This bill designates the SR 710 as a freeway from SR 1 to Valley Boulevard in Alhambra and picking back up starting on California Boulevard in the City of Pasadena, thus removing the freeway designation from the portion north of I-10 to Pasadena. It is, however, unclear what the practical effect of this is, as the entirety of SR 710 remains a designated highway from SR 1 to SR 210 in statute and therefore would still be owned and controlled by Caltrans. Additionally, as noted, local municipalities and Metro are moving forward with evaluating and funding local traffic mitigation projects under the existing designation. Thus, it is unclear why this bill is necessary if local jurisdictions are currently prioritizing resources towards local traffic mitigation alternatives over a freeway extension. Lastly, the effectiveness of this proposal accomplishing the author's intent is unclear; nothing in this bill prohibits this particular portion of SR 710 from being reinstated back to a freeway/expressway in future legislation.

RELATED LEGISLATION:

AB 287 (Holden, 2017) — would have required Caltrans along with LA Metro to create an SR 710 North Advisory Committee; prohibited the advisory committee from considering a tunnel or freeway extension; explicitly prohibited Caltrans from building a freeway tunnel or surface freeway to fill the SR 710 gap. *This bill was held in the Assembly Transportation Committee.*

SB 400 (Portantino, Chapter 568, Statutes of 2017) — prohibited the Department of Transportation from increasing the rent of tenants who reside in surplus residential property located on State Route 710.

SB 580 (Liu, Chapter 709, Statutes of 2016) — made changes to the Roberti Act governing the sale of surplus properties in the SR 710 corridor.

SB 416 (Liu, Chapter 468, Statutes of 2014) — expedited the sale of surplus residential properties in the cities of Los Angeles, South Pasadena, and Pasadena that do not fall within the boundaries of any alternate route being considered in the North Route 710 Project Draft Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Impact Statement.

SB 204 (Liu, 2012) — authorized LA Metro along with Caltrans and jointly with specified cities, to develop and file with the commission a local alternative transportation improvement program that addresses transportation problems and opportunities in specified cities. *Vetoed by Governor Brown, who cited an ongoing review by Caltrans of their owned properties and an ongoing environmental impact report by LA Metro.*

SB 545 (Cedillo, 2009) — would have required that any solution for SR 710 between Valley Boulevard in the City of Los Angeles and Del Mar Boulevard in the City of Pasadena may not be a surface or above-grade highway. *Vetoed by Governor Schwarzenegger, calling it unnecessary as Caltrans and LA Metro worked toward a solution.*

Assembly votes not relevant.

FISCAL EFFECT: Appropriation: No Fiscal Com.: Yes Local: No

POSITIONS: (Communicated to the committee before noon on Wednesday, June 20, 2018.)

SUPPORT:

None received.

OPPOSITION:

City of Alhambra

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