

Date of Hearing: May 5, 2021

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Cecilia Aguiar-Curry, Chair

AB 773 (Nazarian) – As Introduced February 16, 2021

SUBJECT: Street closures and designations.

SUMMARY: Allows local authorities to close portions of streets to through vehicular traffic, and to designate streets as slow streets. Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Allows local authorities to adopt rules and regulations by ordinance or resolution on the following matters:
 - a) Closing a portion of any street to through vehicular traffic if local authorities determine that the closing is necessary for the safety and protection of persons who are to use that portion of the street during the closing; and,
 - b) Designating particular streets as slow streets.
- 2) Defines “slow streets” to include local neighborhood streets with network connections to citywide bicycle networks and green space, prioritized in neighborhoods with the lowest access to parks and highest air pollution burdens.

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) Prohibits a city or county from enacting or enforcing any ordinance or resolution on matters covered by the California Vehicle Code unless expressly authorized by that code.
- 2) Allows local authorities, for those highways under their jurisdiction, to adopt rules and regulations by ordinance or resolution on a number of matters, including:
 - a) Closing any highway to vehicular traffic in specified circumstances
 - b) Designating any highway as a through highway, as specified
 - c) Prohibiting the use of particular highways by certain vehicles, as specified.
 - d) Closing particular streets during regular school hours for the purpose of conducting automobile driver training programs, as specified.
 - e) Temporarily closing a portion of any street for celebrations, parades, local special events, and other purposes, as specified.
 - f) Prohibiting entry to, or exit from, any street by means of islands, curbs, traffic barriers, or other roadway design features, as specified.

FISCAL EFFECT: None.

COMMENTS:

- 1) **Author’s Statement and Bill Summary.** According to the author, “Slow Streets program has offered children, families, and constituents throughout the state of California the opportunity to play, exercise, and socialize, safely, in their own neighborhoods throughout the pandemic. Enacting AB 773 will give local communities the opportunity to have safer and more accessible streets that promote healthy neighborhood recreation, especially during the ongoing public health crisis as AB 773 authorizes local authority to make temporary slow streets permanent slow streets.”

This bill allows local authorities to close portions of streets to through vehicular traffic, and to designate streets as slow streets. Local authorities would have to adopt rules and regulations by ordinance or resolution to do so.

This bill is sponsored by Mayor Eric Garcetti, City of Los Angeles

- 2) **Slow Streets.** According to the National Association of City Transportation Officials, slow streets reduce traffic volume and speed to a minimum so that people can walk, bike, and run safely. Slow streets typically involve the installation of temporary traffic barriers and “Local Traffic Only” signs or similar signage at main vehicle entry points, and the identification of stewards to take care of and monitor barricades. Slow streets allow local access, deliveries, and emergency vehicles.

Both before and especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, cities globally as well as in California have initiated slow streets programs, which are generally focused on providing safe places for people to walk, cycle, skate, or otherwise get outside and exercise without having to worry about vehicular traffic at high speeds. Cities in California that have slow streets programs include Los Angeles, Sacramento, Oakland, and San Francisco, to name a few.

Current law allows local agencies to temporarily close a portion of any street for celebrations, parades, local special events, and other purposes when, in the opinion of local authorities having jurisdiction or a public officer or employee that the local authority designates by resolution, the closing is necessary for the safety and protection of persons who are to use that portion of the street during the temporary closing. It does not allow these closures on an on-going basis.

- 3) **Arguments in Support.** Mayor Eric Garcetti, City of Los Angeles, writes, “Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, cities across California have used temporary authority to create “Slow Streets” programs. The program allows communities to repurpose streets to provide safe recreational spaces close to home in line with public health priorities. Communities disparately impacted by COVID-19 are the same communities who suffer most from air pollution and have less access to parks and open space. Slow Streets has been critical in ensuring everyone has access to an outdoor area with less pollution.

“The City’s program launched in May 2020 and now has more than 50 miles of temporary Slow Streets across 30 neighborhoods. Each Slow Street is a partnership between the City and a local sponsor, with many Slow Streets located in low-income communities with dense housing and poor access to parks. The largest Slow Streets installation is in Koreatown, the

densest neighborhood with the lowest park access per capita. Providing Angelenos access to safe spaces for fresh air has been essential to mental and physical health throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and community response to our program has been extremely positive. The Slow Streets installations have been imperative in reducing the spread of COVID-19 and ensuring community well-being.

“Under current law, Slow Streets programs must be temporary. However, due to the overwhelming demand for the installations, a permanent program would allow the City to develop a plan to reach more residents while still prioritizing their safety. Furthermore, the ability to restrict vehicle access, which requires authorization from the California Vehicle Code, would calm neighborhood-level traffic and improve safety. This bill would support our most vulnerable communities at this critical time without any fiscal impact on the State. AB 773 simply provides cities the opportunity to exercise traffic control actions at their discretion and expense.”

- 4) **Arguments in Opposition.** One individual writes, “I am a concerned resident who lives on a Slow Street in San Francisco, CA. I oppose AB 773 and permanent Slow Streets in California. Slow Streets have had a negative impact on the quality of life of residents since they were enacted without community input or support in 2020. Over the last year, residents have experienced an increase in noise, congestion, crime, trespassing, trash, conflict, and a decrease in our quality of life. Slow Streets have become destination spots where thousands of visitors descend upon once quiet, low traffic streets, on a daily basis to promenade and socialize in groups, often without masks, and increasing the stress that residents face as we try to navigate a post-pandemic world.

“The San Francisco Slow Streets FAQs state that ‘Slow Streets are intended to provide priority pedestrian and bicycle corridors for essential travel...these are not locations for public gatherings.’ Yet, residents reported live music concerts with amplified sound at high decibel readings, large groups bringing in lawn chairs and setting up camp for the day, birthday parties, family reunions, impromptu daycare centers, and a park-like atmosphere, just steps from our personal living space and bedrooms. Residents have also experienced tension and conflict with visitors to Slow Streets. Many residents have been harassed and yelled at when trying to enter and exit their homes, take their trash cans out to the curb, park their cars on the street in front of their homes or pull into their driveway and garages.

“Slow Streets have decreased our quality of life and are a public nuisance. Our streets are now less calm, less friendly, less inviting, and creating conflict instead of connection. SFMTA is not equipped to solve the problems Slow Streets create. They narrowly keep their focus on traffic issues and tell us it’s not within their jurisdiction to solve the problems that their Slow Streets program has created. The police department, the Department of Public Works, and waste management companies do not have the funds, time, or resources to maintain permanent Slow Streets. If more recreation and green space is what California residents need, then we should focus our resources on our existing park systems. Please vote no on street closures.”

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

Mayor Eric Garcetti, City of Los Angeles [SPONSOR]
ActiveSGV
Destination: Pico
Streets for All
67 Individuals

Opposition

1 Individual

Analysis Prepared by: Angela Mapp / L. GOV. / (916) 319-3958