

The Honorable Diane Papan
Chair
Assembly Water, Parks, and Wildlife Committee
1020 N Street, Room 160
Sacramento, CA 95814

The Honorable Lori Wilson
Chair
Assembly Transportation Committee
1021 O Street, Room 8110
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: Pew Support for SB 1250 (Cortese)– Wildlife Connectivity in California Transportation Planning

Dear Chairs Papan and Wilson:

The Pew Charitable Trusts (Pew) writes in support of SB 1250 sponsored by Senator Dave Cortese which integrates wildlife connectivity and its relationship with highway safety into California's transportation planning. The bill would make certain components of wildlife movement a core performance objective of the Department of Transportation's (Caltrans) State Highway Asset Management System. The legislation would also require the California Transportation Commission to adopt targets and performance measures embedding benchmark targets in the Transportation Asset Management Plan (TAMP).

Pew's U.S. Conservation program advances commonsense solutions that address the impacts of a changing environment on nature and communities, in collaboration with policymakers, Tribes, and stakeholders. In California, Pew has supported numerous natural resource and conservation outcomes across the state, such as wildlife connectivity planning and funding that includes convening agencies and stakeholders at the 2020 Northeastern California Wildlife Connectivity Symposium, partnering on legislation such as AB 2344 (Friedman, 2022) to strengthen statewide planning, helping secure connectivity investments through passage of Prop 4 (climate bond), and contributing to the California Wildlife Reconnected Initiative.¹ As an organization that has long engaged in ecological connectivity issues in the state, we urge enactment of SB 1250 as an important next step for California to improve consideration of wildlife connectivity projects in agency planning.

California's vast transportation network of roads and highways, critical for moving people and goods throughout the state, bisects some of our nation's most biodiverse wildlife habitat and contributes to wildlife population decline through breaking up large landscapes, disrupting migration and gene flow, and increasing mortality through wildlife-vehicle collisions (WVCs).² As animals move and migrate between habitat patches, they often come into conflict with motorists, leading to WVCs that cost Californians more than \$200 million per year in property damage, emergency response, and other related expenditures. In rural areas especially, WVCs often constitute a leading cause of accidents, leading to both human and

¹ www.californiawildlifereconnected.wildlifecrossingfund.org/

² Huijser, M. P., McGowen, P. T., Fuller, J., Hardy, A., Kociolek, A., Clevenger, A. P., Smith, D., & Ament, R. (2008). Wildlife-vehicle collision reduction study: Report to Congress (FHWA-HRT-08-034). Federal Highway Administration, U.S. Department of Transportation, <https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/publications/research/safety/08034/08034.pdf> at 57

wildlife injuries or death. Wildlife friendly transportation infrastructure—such as overcrossings, fencing, and adapted culverts—are among the most effective tools available to address the problem, with documented reductions in WVCs of between 80 – 90 percent.³ These interventions make California’s roads safer, save money, and significantly contribute to wildlife conservation goals.

Recognizing the benefits of wildlife friendly infrastructure, California has enacted statewide policies directing agencies to integrate wildlife connectivity and collision reduction strategies into transportation planning and project delivery, including SB790 (2021) and AB2344 (2022).⁴ Unfortunately, despite these clear policy directions, the current TAMP does not reference or operationalize any of the state’s connectivity-related mandates or objectives. This gap between state policy and the state’s primary investment planning document for maintaining the state and national highway systems limits the ability to translate adopted goals into actionable planning, programming, and investing decisions.

SB 1250 addresses this long-recognized gap between policy and action by: (1) establishing wildlife connectivity as a formal performance objective within the asset management system; (2) requiring clear connectivity targets in the TAMP; and (3) clarifying a collaborative, transparent process for public input and interagency coordination to develop Caltrans’ inventory of connectivity needs. SB 1250 does *not*: alter Caltrans’ planning methodology or asset management practices; impose retroactive requirements on prior TAMPs, past inventories, projects underway or previously adopted plans; create new mandates, unfunded obligations; require to engineering, constructing, or retrofitting wildlife crossings; or impose new project-level requirements. Rather, it ensures wildlife connectivity is treated consistently in the future with other highway assets already reflected in the TAMP.

Connectivity projects rarely entail large standalone crossings. In most instances, improved connectivity can be achieved through modest modifications to other highway improvement projects. Through integrating connectivity systemically as components of multi-benefit State Highway Operations and Protection Program (SHOPP) projects, SB 1250 is designed to reduce long-term costs and save taxpayer dollars. By improving planning efficiency, SB 1250 would allow the state to reduce costly WVCs by targeting predictable, high-cost hotspots, while capturing low-cost, high-return opportunities during planned projects instead of relying on more expensive retrofits later. It would also prioritize cost-effective upgrades to existing infrastructure and ensure limited transportation funds are directed to the highest-return locations using better data and performance tracking, while leveraging additional federal, state, and private funding for shared conservation goals.

³ See Huijser, M. P., McGowen, P. T., Fuller, J., Hardy, A., Kociolek, A., Clevenger, A. P., Smith, D., & Ament, R. (2008). Wildlife-vehicle collision reduction study: Report to Congress (FHWA-HRT-08-034). Federal Highway Administration, U.S. Department of Transportation, https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/publications/research/safety/08034/08034.pdf#at_106-123

⁴ Div 1 Ch 1 SHC § 158-158.5, Barriers to Wildlife Movement; Div 1 Ch 1 SHC § 156-156.5, Barriers to Fish Passage; Div 2 Ch 13.5 FGC 1955-1957, Wildlife Connectivity Actions ; Div 3 Ch 20 SHC § 2704.04-2704.095, High Speed Rail Div 26 Ch 6 PRC § 35180-35186, Coyote Valley Conservation Program; California Transportation Plan 2050; draft State Highway System Management Plan (2025).

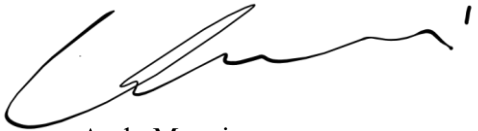
This reform arrives at an especially important moment for wildlife in the state. The California Fish and Game Commission recently voted to list southern California and Central Coast mountain lions as threatened under the California Endangered Species Act, citing habitat fragmentation, roadway barriers, and genetic isolation as key threats.

Like mountain lions, many other species, including desert tortoise, bighorn sheep, and San Joaquin kit fox, are similarly at risk. Aligning transportation planning with these protections, as is accomplished through SB 1250, will provide timely and necessary support for species recovery while simultaneously contributing to road safety objectives.

Pew appreciates Caltrans' ongoing efforts, including its implementation of the Wildlife Connectivity Program and district level collaborations, and views SB 1250 as supporting the work Caltrans is already doing while presenting a clear statewide mandate and performance framework needed to scale those efforts consistently and efficiently.

For these reasons, we respectfully urge your support of the bill when it is heard in the Senate Transportation Committee. Please do not hesitate to reach out to me, Andy Maggi, amaggi@pewtrusts.org or (503) 765-1142 should you have any questions.

Thank you for your consideration.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Andy Maggi', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Andy Maggi
Officer, U.S. Conservation
The Pew Charitable Trusts