

BILL: AB 1855 (Gonzalez, R–Indio)
Introduced February 11, 2026

SUBJECT: AB 1855 would expand an existing statutory exemption under the California Environmental Quality Act for certain passenger rail projects

STATUS: Pending in Assembly Committee on Natural Resources

SUMMARY AS OF MARCH 17, 2026:

AB 1855, sponsored by the Riverside County Transportation Commission (RCTC), would expand an existing statutory exemption under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) for certain passenger rail projects. Existing law, until January 1, 2040, exempts certain projects for the improvement, institution, or expansion of passenger rail service, including the construction, maintenance, or rehabilitation of stations, terminals, and operations facilities, from CEQA review, provided that the projects are used exclusively by zero-emission trains or certified Tier 4 or cleaner rolling stock and are located entirely within an existing rail or highway right-of-way.

AB 1855 would modify these requirements, broadening the scope of eligible projects. Specifically, the bill would revise the right-of-way requirement by requiring only the mainline rail component of a project, rather than the entire project, to be located within an existing right-of-way. Additionally, the bill expands the exemption to include projects that provide new daily passenger rail service between termini more than 5 miles apart where none exists as of January 1, 2027, and operates parallel to a state or interstate highway corridor.

EFFECTS ON ORANGE COUNTY:

AB 1855 may support more efficient delivery of rail projects within the region by expanding the applicability of an existing CEQA exemption for rail projects within established transportation corridors. Current CEQA exemption criteria can limit eligibility where projects involve mixed rolling stock, evolving propulsion technologies, or elements located outside strict right-of-way boundaries.

By removing the rolling stock restriction and modifying the right-of-way requirement, AB 1855 may enable a broader range of rail projects to qualify for CEQA exemption, potentially reducing environmental review timelines and administrative complexity. This may help accelerate delivery of projects that improve service reliability, enhance safety, and support long-term corridor resiliency.

Rail projects typically require extensive coordination among multiple agencies, as well as alignment with state and federal funding cycles. Greater flexibility in CEQA applicability may provide increased certainty in project delivery schedules and reduce risks associated with environmental clearance delays.

For OCTA, this expanded exemption supports ongoing efforts to maintain and improve critical rail infrastructure. Maintaining efficient project delivery timelines is essential to preserving regional mobility, economic activity, and connectivity. RCTC has requested OCTA take a support position on this bill. A SUPPORT position is consistent with OCTA's 2025-26 State Legislative Platform principle to "Support streamlined environmental review and permitting processes for transportation projects and programs to avoid potentially duplicative and unnecessary analysis, while still maintaining traditional environmental protections."

OCTA POSITION:

Staff recommends: SUPPORT

ASSEMBLY BILL

No. 1855

Introduced by Assembly Member Jeff Gonzalez
(Coauthors: Assembly Members Castillo, Jackson, Johnson, and
Wallis)
(Coauthors: Senators Seyarto and Valladares)

February 11, 2026

An act to amend Section 21080.25 of the Public Resources Code, relating to environmental quality.

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

AB 1855, as introduced, Jeff Gonzalez. California Environmental Quality Act: exemption: passenger rail service.

The California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) requires a lead agency, as defined, to prepare, or cause to be prepared, and certify the completion of, an environmental impact report on a project that it proposes to carry out or approve that may have a significant effect on the environment or to adopt a negative declaration if it finds that the project will not have that effect. CEQA also requires a lead agency to prepare a mitigated negative declaration for a project that may have a significant effect on the environment if revisions in the project would avoid or mitigate that effect and there is no substantial evidence that the project, as revised, would have a significant effect on the environment.

CEQA, until January 1, 2040, exempts from its requirements certain projects for the improvement, institution, or increase of passenger rail service, including the maintenance, construction, or rehabilitation of stations, terminals, or existing operations facilities, which will be exclusively used by zero-emission trains or certified Tier 4 or cleaner

rolling stock or locomotives, as provided. CEQA requires, for purposes of this exemption, that the project be located entirely within an existing rail right-of-way or existing highway right-of-way, as provided.

This bill would instead eliminate the condition that the public project be exclusively used by zero-emission trains or certified Tier 4 or cleaner rolling stock or locomotives, thereby expanding the scope of the exemption. The bill would require, for purposes of the exemption, the mainline rail of the project, instead of the whole project, to be located entirely within an existing right-of-way or existing highway right-of-way.

As part of the above-described exemption, CEQA prohibits a public project from being eligible for that exemption if used by certified Tier 4 or cleaner rolling stock or locomotives that are not zero-emission rolling stock or locomotives and the project is located in an air basin designated as a serious, severe, or extreme nonattainment area for particulate matter and ozone.

This bill would instead authorize an otherwise ineligible project, as described above, to be eligible for the exemption if the project would provide daily passenger rail service between termini more than 5 miles apart where none exists as of January 1, 2027, and the rail service would run parallel to a state highway or interstate highway corridor.

Because a lead agency would be required to determine whether a project qualifies for these expanded exemptions, the bill would impose a state-mandated local program.

The California Constitution requires the state to reimburse local agencies and school districts for certain costs mandated by the state. Statutory provisions establish procedures for making that reimbursement.

This bill would provide that no reimbursement is required by this act for a specified reason.

Vote: majority. Appropriation: no. Fiscal committee: yes.
State-mandated local program: yes.

The people of the State of California do enact as follows:

- 1 SECTION 1. Section 21080.25 of the Public Resources Code
- 2 is amended to read:
- 3 21080.25. (a) For purposes of this section, the following
- 4 definitions apply:
- 5 (1) "Affordable housing" means any of the following:

1 (A) Housing that is subject to a recorded covenant, ordinance,
2 or law that restricts rents or sales prices to levels affordable, as
3 defined in Section 50052.5 or 50053 of the Health and Safety
4 Code, to persons and families of moderate, lower, or very low
5 income, as defined in Section 50079.5, 50093, or 50105 of the
6 Health and Safety Code, respectively.

7 (B) Housing that is subject to any form of rent or price control
8 through a public entity's valid exercise of its police power.

9 (C) Housing that had been occupied by tenants within five years
10 from the date of approval of the development agreement by a
11 primary tenant who was low income and did not leave voluntarily.

12 (2) "Bicycle facilities" includes, but is not limited to, bicycle
13 parking, bicycle sharing facilities, and bikeways as defined in
14 Section 890.4 of the Streets and Highways Code.

15 (3) "High-occupancy vehicle" means a vehicle with three or
16 more occupants.

17 (4) "Highway" means a way or place of whatever nature,
18 publicly maintained and open to the use of the public for purposes
19 of vehicular travel. "Highway" includes a street.

20 (5) "Local agency" means a public transit operator, city, county,
21 city and county, special district, joint powers authority, local or
22 regional transportation agency, or congestion management agency.

23 (6) "Part-time transit lanes" means designated highway
24 shoulders that support the operation of transit vehicles during
25 specified times and are not open to nonpublic transit vehicles at
26 any time.

27 (7) "Project labor agreement" has the same meaning as defined
28 in paragraph (1) of subdivision (b) of Section 2500 of the Public
29 Contract Code.

30 (8) "Public transit operator" has the same meaning as "operator"
31 in Section 99210 of the Public Utilities Code, or means a public
32 entity that provides contracted paratransit services.

33 (9) "Skilled and trained workforce" has the same meaning as
34 provided in Chapter 2.9 (commencing with Section 2600) of Part
35 1 of Division 2 of the Public Contract Code.

36 (10) "Transit lanes" means street design elements that delineate
37 space within the roadbed as exclusive to transit use, either full or
38 part time.

39 (11) "Transit prioritization projects" means any of the following
40 transit project types on highways or in the public right-of-way:

1 (A) Signal and sign changes, such as signal coordination, signal
 2 timing modifications, signal modifications, or the installation of
 3 traffic signs or new signals.

4 (B) The installation of wayside technology and onboard
 5 technology.

6 (C) The installation of ramp meters.

7 (D) The conversion to dedicated transit lanes, including transit
 8 queue jump or bypass lanes, shared turning lanes and turn
 9 restrictions, the narrowing of lanes to allow for dedicated transit
 10 lanes or transit reliability improvements, or the widening of existing
 11 transit travel lanes by removing or restricting street parking.

12 (E) Transit stop access and safety improvements, including, but
 13 not limited to, the installation of bus shelters, lighting, transit bulbs,
 14 and the installation of transit boarding landings and islands.

15 (12) "Transportation demand management program" means a
 16 specific program of strategies, incentives, and tools to be
 17 implemented, including, with specified annual status reporting
 18 obligations, to reduce vehicle trips by providing opportunities for
 19 the public to choose sustainable travel options, such as transit,
 20 bicycle riding, or walking. A specific program of strategies,
 21 incentives, and tools includes, but is not limited to, any of the
 22 following:

23 (A) Provision of onsite electric vehicle charging stations in
 24 excess of applicable requirements.

25 (B) Provision of dedicated parking for car share or zero-emission
 26 vehicles, or both types of vehicles, in excess of applicable
 27 requirements.

28 (C) Provision of bicycle parking in excess of applicable
 29 requirements.

30 (b) This division does not apply to any of the following projects:

31 (1) Pedestrian and bicycle facilities that improve safety, access,
 32 or mobility, including new facilities, within the public right-of-way.

33 (2) Projects that improve customer information and wayfinding
 34 for transit riders, bicyclists, or pedestrians within the public
 35 right-of-way.

36 (3) Transit prioritization projects.

37 (4) A project for the designation and conversion of general
 38 purpose lanes to high-occupancy vehicle lanes or bus-only lanes,
 39 or highway shoulders to part-time transit lanes, for use either during
 40 peak congestion hours or all day on highways with existing public

1 transit service or where a public transit agency will be
2 implementing public transit service as identified in a short-range
3 transit plan.

4 (5) (A) A public project for the protection, improvement,
5 institution, or increase of microtransit, paratransit, shuttle, bus,
6 ferry, bus rapid transit, or light rail service, including the protection,
7 maintenance, construction, operation, or rehabilitation of stops,
8 stations, terminals, or existing operations facilities, which will be
9 exclusively used by zero-emission, near-zero-emission, low oxide
10 of nitrogen engine, compressed natural gas fuel, fuel cell, or hybrid
11 powertrain vehicles, rail or cable cars, rolling stock, or vessels.
12 The project shall be located entirely within an existing public
13 right-of-way or existing highway right-of-way, whether or not the
14 right-of-way is in use for rail or public mass transit and is wholly
15 within the boundaries of an urbanized area or urban cluster, as
16 designated by the United States Census Bureau.

17 (B) A public project otherwise identified in subparagraph (A)
18 shall not apply to the exemption pursuant to this paragraph after
19 January 1, 2032, if used primarily by near-zero-emission, low
20 oxide of nitrogen engine, compressed natural gas fuel, or hybrid
21 powertrain vehicles. This subparagraph shall not apply to a public
22 project otherwise identified in subparagraph (A) used by articulated
23 buses.

24 (C) A public project for the construction or rehabilitation of a
25 ferry terminal that a lead agency has submitted a notice of
26 preparation for an environmental impact report pursuant to Section
27 21092 before January 1, 2026, shall not apply to the exemption
28 pursuant to this paragraph.

29 (D) A public project for transit services operated by a
30 transportation network company, as defined in Section 5431 of
31 the Public Utilities Code, shall not apply to the exemption pursuant
32 to this paragraph, unless the services are operated by a microtransit
33 provider contracted by the lead agency that uses a managed fleet
34 of multipassenger vehicles dedicated to that service.

35 (6) (A) A public project for the improvement, institution, or
36 increase of passenger rail service, other than light rail service
37 eligible under paragraph (5), including the maintenance,
38 construction, or rehabilitation of stations, terminals, or existing
39 operations facilities, which will be ~~exclusively~~ used by
40 zero-emission trains or certified Tier 4 or cleaner rolling stock or

1 locomotives, as provided in Section 1033.101 of Title 40 of the
2 Code of Federal Regulations. The *mainline rail for that* project
3 shall be located entirely within an existing rail right-of-way or
4 existing highway right-of-way, whether or not the right-of-way is
5 in use for passenger rail transit.

6 (B) A public project otherwise identified in subparagraph (A)
7 shall not be eligible for the exemption pursuant to this paragraph
8 if used by certified Tier 4 or cleaner rolling stock or locomotives
9 that are not zero-emission rolling stock or locomotives and the
10 project is located in an air basin designated as a serious, severe,
11 or extreme nonattainment area for particulate matter and ozone.
12 *This subparagraph shall not apply to a public project that would*
13 *provide daily passenger rail service between termini more than*
14 *five miles apart where none exists as of January 1, 2027, and the*
15 *rail service would run parallel to a state highway or interstate*
16 *highway corridor.*

17 (7) (A) A public project to construct or maintain infrastructure
18 or facilities to charge, refuel, power, or maintain zero-emission
19 public transit buses, trains, or ferries, provided the project is carried
20 out by a public transit agency and the project is any of the
21 following:

22 (i) Located on property owned, leased, or operated by the local
23 agency.

24 (ii) Located within an existing public right-of-way.

25 (iii) Located on property owned by a public or private utility
26 within an urbanized area.

27 (B) A lead agency applying an exemption pursuant to this
28 paragraph for hydrogen refueling infrastructure or facilities
29 necessary to refuel or maintain zero-emission public transit buses,
30 trains, or ferries shall comply with clauses (i), (iii), and (iv) of
31 subparagraph (D) of, and with subparagraph (E) of, paragraph (1)
32 of subdivision (d).

33 (8) The maintenance, repair, relocation, replacement, or removal
34 of any utility infrastructure associated with a project identified in
35 paragraphs (1) to (7), inclusive.

36 (9) A project that consists exclusively of a combination of any
37 of the components of a project identified in paragraphs (1) to (8),
38 inclusive.

39 (10) (A) A project that combines a project identified in
40 paragraphs (1) to (8), inclusive, and a housing development project

1 that is either subject to a nondiscretionary approval or is exempt
2 from this division.

3 (B) This paragraph does not exempt the housing development
4 project described in subparagraph (A) from any other applicable
5 requirements under any other law.

6 (11) A planning decision carried out by a local agency to reduce
7 or eliminate minimum parking requirements or institute parking
8 maximums, remove or restrict parking, or implement transportation
9 demand management requirements or programs.

10 (c) Except as provided in subdivision (g), a project exempt from
11 this division under this section shall meet all of the following
12 criteria:

13 (1) (A) A local agency is carrying out the project and is the
14 lead agency for the project.

15 (B) The lead agency shall take an action to approve a project
16 as follows:

17 (i) The lead agency's governing board shall take an action at a
18 public meeting.

19 (ii) Notwithstanding clause (i), if a lead agency has an alternative
20 project approval process for a project subject to subdivision (b),
21 it may instead follow that alternative process.

22 (2) The project does not induce single-occupancy vehicle trips,
23 add additional highway lanes, widen highways, or add physical
24 infrastructure or striping to highways except for minor
25 modifications needed for the efficient and safe movement of transit
26 vehicles, bicycles, or high-occupancy vehicles, such as extended
27 merging lanes, shoulder improvements, or improvements to the
28 roadway within the existing right-of-way. The project shall not
29 include the addition of any auxiliary lanes.

30 (3) The construction of the project shall not require the
31 demolition of affordable housing units.

32 (d) (1) A project that is exempt from this division under this
33 section that is, based on the project engineer's cost estimate at the
34 time the local agency takes an action pursuant to subparagraph (B)
35 of paragraph (1) of subdivision (c), anticipated to exceed one
36 hundred million dollars (\$100,000,000) shall also meet all of the
37 following criteria:

38 (A) The project is incorporated in a regional transportation plan,
39 sustainable communities strategy, general plan, or other plan that
40 has undergone a programmatic-level environmental review

1 pursuant to this division within 10 years of the approval of the
2 project.

3 (B) The project's construction impacts are fully mitigated
4 consistent with applicable law.

5 (C) (i) The lead agency shall complete and consider the results
6 of a project business case and a racial equity analysis. The Office
7 of Land Use and Climate Innovation may set guidelines for the
8 project business case and the racial equity analysis or delegate that
9 authority to metropolitan planning organizations.

10 (ii) The racial equity analysis required under this subparagraph
11 shall identify the racial equity impacts of the project, identify who
12 will benefit from and be burdened by the project, and, where
13 significant or disproportionate impacts exist, suggest strategies,
14 designs, or actions to mitigate those impacts.

15 (D) The lead agency shall hold noticed public meetings as
16 follows:

17 (i) Before determining that a project is exempt pursuant to this
18 section, the lead agency shall hold at least three noticed public
19 meetings in the project area to hear and respond to public
20 comments.

21 (ii) At least one of the three public meetings shall review the
22 project business case and the racial equity analysis. The review of
23 these documents does not inhibit or preclude application of this
24 section.

25 (iii) The lead agency shall conduct at least two noticed public
26 meetings annually during project construction for the public to
27 provide comments.

28 (iv) The public meetings held pursuant to clauses (i) to (iii),
29 inclusive, shall be in the form of either a public community
30 planning meeting held in the project area or in the form of a
31 regularly scheduled meeting of the governing body of the lead
32 agency.

33 (E) The lead agency shall give public notice of the meetings in
34 subparagraph (D) to the last known name and address of all the
35 organizations and individuals that have previously requested notice
36 and shall also give the general public notice using at least one of
37 the following procedures:

38 (i) Publication of the notice in a newspaper of general circulation
39 in the area affected by the project. If more than one area will be
40 affected, the notice shall be published in the newspaper of largest

1 circulation from among the newspapers of general circulation in
2 those areas.

3 (ii) Posting of the notice onsite and offsite in the area where the
4 project is located.

5 (iii) Posting of the notice on the lead agency's internet website
6 and social media accounts.

7 (2) In addition to the requirements of paragraph (1), for a project
8 described in that paragraph for which at least 50 percent of the
9 project or project's stops and stations are located in an area that is
10 at risk of residential displacement and that will have a maximum
11 of 15-minute peak headways, the local agency shall complete an
12 analysis of residential displacement and suggest antidisplacement
13 strategies, designs, or actions. For a project subject to this
14 paragraph, the lead agency shall define or identify areas at risk of
15 residential displacement.

16 (3) The amount in paragraph (1) shall be adjusted pursuant to
17 subdivision (j).

18 (e) (1) A project that is exempt from this division under this
19 section that is, based on the project engineer's cost estimate at the
20 time the local agency takes an action pursuant to subparagraph (B)
21 of paragraph (1) of subdivision (c), anticipated to exceed fifty
22 million dollars (\$50,000,000) shall also comply with clauses (i),
23 (iii), and (iv) of subparagraph (D) of, and with subparagraph (E)
24 of, paragraph (1) of subdivision (d).

25 (2) The amount in paragraph (1) shall be adjusted pursuant to
26 subdivision (j).

27 (f) (1) (A) Except as provided in subdivision (g), as part of the
28 lead agency's governing board action pursuant to subparagraph
29 (B) of paragraph (1) of subdivision (c), the lead agency shall certify
30 that the project will be completed by a skilled and trained
31 workforce.

32 (B) Subparagraph (A) does not apply if the lead agency has an
33 existing policy or certification approved by its governing board
34 that requires the use of a skilled and trained workforce to complete
35 the project if the lead agency is a signatory to a project labor
36 agreement that will require the use of a skilled and trained
37 workforce on the project.

38 (2) (A) Except as provided in subparagraph (B), for a project
39 that is exempted under this section, the lead agency shall not enter
40 into a construction contract with any entity unless the entity

1 provides to the lead agency an enforceable commitment that the
2 entity and its subcontractors at every tier will use a skilled and
3 trained workforce to perform all work on the project or a contract
4 that falls within an apprenticeship occupation in the building and
5 construction trades in accordance with Chapter 2.9 (commencing
6 with Section 2600) of Part 1 of Division 2 of the Public Contract
7 Code.

8 (B) Subparagraph (A) does not apply if any of the following
9 requirements are met:

10 (i) The lead agency has entered into a project labor agreement
11 that will bind all contractors and subcontractors performing work
12 on the project to use a skilled and trained workforce and the entity
13 has agreed to be bound by that project labor agreement.

14 (ii) The project or contract is being performed under the
15 extension or renewal of a project labor agreement that was entered
16 into by the lead agency before January 1, 2021.

17 (iii) The entity contracted to perform the project entered into a
18 project labor agreement that will bind the entity and all its
19 subcontractors at every tier performing the project to use a skilled
20 and trained workforce.

21 (g) Subdivisions (c) and (f) do not apply to a project described
22 in paragraph (11) of subdivision (b).

23 (h) If the lead agency determines that a project is not subject to
24 this division pursuant to this section, and the lead agency
25 determines to carry out that project, the lead agency shall file a
26 notice of exemption with the Office of Land Use and Climate
27 Innovation and the county clerk of the county in which the project
28 is located in the manner specified in subdivisions (b) and (c) of
29 Section 21152.

30 (i) (1) The amendments made to paragraph (5) of subdivision
31 (b) by Chapter 987 of the Statutes of 2022 (Senate Bill 922 of the
32 2021–22 Regular Session) may apply to projects for which a lead
33 agency has filed a notice of exemption under this section before
34 January 1, 2023.

35 (2) For projects for which a lead agency has filed a notice of
36 exemption under this section before January 1, 2023,
37 notwithstanding subdivision (d), as it read on December 31, 2022,
38 the lead agency may certify that the project will be completed by
39 a skilled and trained workforce after the granting of the exemption

1 under this section or the lead agency may demonstrate compliance
2 with subparagraph (B) of paragraph (1) of subdivision (f).

3 (j) (1) Beginning January 1, 2026, and every two years
4 thereafter, the Office of Land Use and Climate Innovation shall
5 adjust the amounts reflected in paragraph (1) of subdivision (c)
6 and paragraph (1) of subdivision (e) to reflect changes in the
7 Consumer Price Index, as indicated in the Consumer Price Index
8 for All Urban Consumers, as calculated by the Department of
9 Finance based on the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics data
10 for the most recent odd-numbered year, and publish the updated
11 amounts on its internet website.

12 (2) Notwithstanding the rulemaking provisions of the
13 Administrative Procedure Act (Chapter 3.5 (commencing with
14 Section 11340) of Part 1 of Division 3 of Title 2 of the Government
15 Code), the Office of Land Use and Climate Innovation may
16 implement, interpret, or make specific this subdivision without
17 taking any regulatory action.

18 (k) This section shall remain in effect only until January 1, 2040,
19 and as of that date is repealed.

20 SEC. 2. No reimbursement is required by this act pursuant to
21 Section 6 of Article XIII B of the California Constitution because
22 a local agency or school district has the authority to levy service
23 charges, fees, or assessments sufficient to pay for the program or
24 level of service mandated by this act, within the meaning of Section
25 17556 of the Government Code.

O