

BILL: AB 1944 (Lee, D-Milpitas)
Introduced February 13, 2026

SUBJECT: AB 1944 would establish a phased extension of axle weight allowances for zero-emission transit buses to support fleet transition requirements

STATUS: Pending on Assembly Floor
Passed the Assembly Transportation Committee 15-1

SUMMARY AS OF MARCH 31, 2026:

AB 1944 proposes to extend and gradually phase down allowable single-axle curb weight limits for zero-emission transit buses procured between January 1, 2027, and December 31, 2031. The bill is intended to provide transit agencies and manufacturers with additional flexibility as zero-emission bus technologies continue to evolve.

Existing law limits the maximum gross weight on any one axle of a zero-emission or articulated bus to 22,000 pounds. The Legislature previously authorized temporary, higher weight allowances for zero-emission and articulated transit buses procured between 2016 and 2021, with limits phased down over that period. These temporary allowances expired on January 1, 2022, at which point the allowable axle weight reverted to the current standard of 22,000 pounds per axle.

AB 1944 would effectively reintroduce a new temporary phase-in period for heavier zero-emission buses beginning in 2027, recognizing that current vehicle technologies may still exceed the standard axle weight limit in order for manufacturers to facilitate transit agency range requirements. Specifically, the bill would allow:

- Up to 25,000 pounds per axle for buses procured in 2027
- Up to 24,000 pounds for buses procured in 2028 and 2029
- Up to 23,000 pounds for buses procured in 2030 and 2031

Beginning January 1, 2032, the allowable axle weight would return to 22,000 pounds. The bill maintains existing federal weight compliance requirements and does not authorize operation of transit buses in excess of applicable interstate highway standards.

EFFECTS ON ORANGE COUNTY:

The Orange County Transportation Authority (OCTA) is required to comply with the California Air Resources Board's Innovative Clean Transit regulation, which requires transit agencies to transition to 100 percent zero-emission buses by 2040.

Zero-emission transit buses, including battery-electric and hydrogen fuel cell vehicles, are generally heavier than conventional diesel buses due to onboard batteries, hydrogen storage systems, and associated equipment. These weight increases can affect axle load

distribution, particularly as agencies seek to extend vehicle range or incorporate additional onboard systems. Axle weight limits therefore play a critical role in vehicle design, procurement feasibility, and operational deployment.

By extending higher axle weight allowances through a phased approach, AB 1944 provides transit agencies, including OCTA, with additional flexibility to procure zero-emission buses that meet operational needs while manufacturers continue to improve vehicle design and reduce weight. This flexibility may help avoid procurement delays, reduce the need for design compromises, and support more efficient fleet deployment during a key transition period.

For OCTA, the bill could support ongoing and future procurements of zero-emission buses by aligning regulatory requirements with current technological constraints. This is particularly important as the agency balances range requirements, passenger capacity, and infrastructure considerations such as charging or fueling systems. The phased reduction approach also provides a clear long-term signal to manufacturers and agencies that weight limits will tighten over time, encouraging continued innovation while avoiding near-term operational disruptions. Additionally, maintaining alignment with federal highway weight limits ensures that OCTA operations remain compliant on interstate facilities, minimizing potential impacts to regional mobility and service reliability.

Overall, AB 1944 helps facilitate a smoother transition to zero-emission transit by addressing a key technical barrier associated with vehicle weight, while preserving long-term policy goals related to infrastructure protection and vehicle standardization. A SUPPORT position is consistent with OCTA's 2025-26 State Legislative Platform principle to "Support efforts to mitigate costs associated with the development, testing, purchase, and operation of zero-emission transit buses, including an alternative electricity rate structure, tax incentives, and other forms of financial assistance."

OCTA POSITION:

Staff recommends: SUPPORT

ASSEMBLY BILL

No. 1944

Introduced by Assembly Member Lee

February 13, 2026

An act to amend Section 35554 of the Vehicle Code, relating to vehicles.

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

AB 1944, as introduced, Lee. Zero-emission transit buses: axle weight.

Existing law prohibits the maximum gross weight on any one axle of a bus from exceeding 20,500 pounds, except the maximum limit for the curb weight on any one axle of a transit bus procured through a solicitation process pursuant to which a solicitation was issued on or after January 1, 2019, is set at 22,000 pounds. Existing law, notwithstanding the previous provisions, sets specified higher maximum limits up to 25,000 pounds for the curb weight on any one axle of an articulated transit bus or zero-emission transit bus procured through a solicitation process pursuant to which a solicitation was issued during specified periods between January 1, 2016, and December 31, 2021, inclusive, and sets the 22,000-pound maximum limit for an articulated transit bus or zero-emission transit bus procured through a solicitation process pursuant to which a solicitation was issued on or after January 1, 2022. A violation of this provision is a crime.

This bill would, until January 1, 2032, establish specified higher weight limitations up to 25,000 pounds for zero-emission transit buses procured through a solicitation process pursuant to which a solicitation was issued at various specified periods between January 1, 2027, and December 31, 2031 inclusive.

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

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

1 SECTION 1. Section 35554 of the Vehicle Code is amended
2 to read:
3 35554. (a) (1) Notwithstanding Section 35550, the maximum
4 gross weight on any one axle of a bus shall not exceed 20,500
5 pounds.
6 (2) This subdivision does not apply to a transit bus procured
7 through a solicitation process pursuant to which a solicitation was
8 issued before January 1, 2016. This subdivision does not apply to
9 a bus purchased during an option period in a multiyear contract to
10 purchase transit buses that is entered into before January 1, 2016,
11 by a publicly owned or operated transit system, or an operator of
12 a transit system under contract with a publicly owned or operated
13 transit system, provided, however, that the option period does not
14 exceed five years from the date of the original contract, or extend
15 beyond January 1, 2021, whichever is earlier.
16 (b) A transit bus is not subject to Section 35550.
17 (c) Notwithstanding subdivision (a), the following provisions
18 shall apply to a transit bus:
19 (1) The curb weight on any one axle of a transit bus procured
20 through a solicitation process pursuant to which a solicitation was
21 issued between January 1, 2016, and December 31, 2018, inclusive,
22 shall not exceed 23,000 pounds.
23 (2) The curb weight on any one axle of a transit bus procured
24 through a solicitation process pursuant to which a solicitation was
25 issued on or after January 1, 2019, shall not exceed 22,000 pounds.
26 (d) Notwithstanding subdivisions (a) and (c), the following
27 provisions shall apply to an articulated transit bus or zero-emission
28 transit bus:
29 (1) The curb weight on any one axle of an articulated transit
30 bus or zero-emission transit bus procured through a solicitation
31 process pursuant to which a solicitation was issued between
32 January 1, 2016, and December 31, 2017, inclusive, shall not
33 exceed 25,000 pounds.
34 (2) The curb weight on any one axle of an articulated transit
35 bus or zero-emission transit bus procured through a solicitation

1 process pursuant to which a solicitation was issued between
 2 January 1, 2018, and December 31, 2019, inclusive, shall not
 3 exceed 24,000 pounds.

4 (3) The curb weight on any one axle of an articulated transit
 5 bus or zero-emission transit bus procured through a solicitation
 6 process pursuant to which a solicitation was issued between
 7 January 1, 2020, and December 31, 2021, inclusive, shall not
 8 exceed 23,000 pounds.

9 (4) The curb weight on any one axle of an articulated transit
 10 bus or zero-emission transit bus procured through a solicitation
 11 process pursuant to which a solicitation was issued on or after
 12 January 1, 2022, shall not exceed 22,000 pounds.

13 *(e) Notwithstanding subdivisions (a), (c), and (d), the following*
 14 *provisions shall apply to a zero-emission transit bus:*

15 *(1) The curb weight on any one axle of a zero-emission transit*
 16 *bus procured through a solicitation process pursuant to which a*
 17 *solicitation was issued between January 1, 2027, and December*
 18 *31, 2027, inclusive, shall not exceed 25,000 pounds.*

19 *(2) The curb weight on any one axle of a zero-emission transit*
 20 *bus procured through a solicitation process pursuant to which a*
 21 *solicitation was issued between January 1, 2028, and December*
 22 *31, 2029, inclusive, shall not exceed 24,000 pounds.*

23 *(3) The curb weight on any one axle of a zero-emission transit*
 24 *bus procured through a solicitation process pursuant to which a*
 25 *solicitation was issued between January 1, 2030, and December*
 26 *31, 2031, inclusive, shall not exceed 23,000 pounds.*

27 *(4) The curb weight on any one axle of a zero-emission transit*
 28 *bus procured through a solicitation process pursuant to which a*
 29 *solicitation was issued on or after January 1, 2032, shall not*
 30 *exceed 22,000 pounds.*

31 ~~(e)~~

32 *(f) Nothing in this article shall be construed to authorize a*
 33 *vehicle described in paragraph (2) of subdivision (a) or described*
 34 *in subdivision ~~(e)~~ or ~~(d)~~ (c), (d), or (e) to be operated in violation*
 35 *of Section 35753.*

36 ~~(f)~~

37 *(g) A transit operator operating an articulated transit bus shall,*
 38 *by July 1, 2016, provide notice to all cities and counties in whose*
 39 *jurisdiction the bus will operate in the upcoming calendar year,*
 40 *identifying the approximate routes upon which the bus is expected*

1 to be scheduled for service, including the names of streets and
2 roads upon which that service is likely to take place. Thereafter,
3 a transit operator operating an articulated transit bus shall annually
4 provide notice by July 1, to all cities and counties in whose
5 jurisdiction the bus will operate in the upcoming calendar year,
6 identifying any changes to the service on those routes and any new
7 routes upon which the bus is expected to be scheduled for the
8 upcoming year. The notice shall include data from information
9 provided by the bus manufacturer to the transit operator, identifying
10 the weight of the articulated bus.

11 ~~(g)~~

12 *(h)* For purposes of this section, the term “curb weight” means
13 the total weight of a fully loaded transit bus, including maximum
14 fuel, oil, and coolant, and all equipment used in the normal
15 operation of the bus, except without passengers or a driver.

16 ~~(h)~~

17 *(i)* Notwithstanding subdivisions (a) to ~~(g)~~, *(h)*, inclusive, a
18 transit bus shall not operate on the Dwight D. Eisenhower System
19 of Interstate and Defense Highways in excess of the weight
20 limitation for transit buses specified in federal law.

21 ~~(i)~~

22 *(j)* If the gross weight imposed upon the highway by the wheels
23 on any one axle of a transit bus exceeds 20,000 pounds, the axle
24 shall be supported by four wheels bearing load upon the highway.