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AB-2678 Vehicles: high-occupancy vehicle lanes. (2023-2024)

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Assembly Bill No. 2678

CHAPTER 414

An act to amend Sections 5205.5 and 21655.9 of the Vehicle Code, relating to vehicles.

[Approved by Governor September 22, 2024. Filed with Secretary of State September 22, 2024.]

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

AB 2678, Wallis. Vehicles: high-occupancy vehicle lanes.

Existing state law authorizes the Department of Transportation to designate certain lanes for the exclusive use of high-occupancy vehicles (HOVs).

Existing federal law authorizes, until September 30, 2025, a state to allow specified alternate fuel and plug-in electric or hybrid vehicles to use lanes designated for HOVs.

Existing state law authorizes the Department of Motor Vehicles to issue decals or other identifiers to qualified vehicles, as specified. Existing state law allows a vehicle displaying a valid decal or identifier issued pursuant to these provisions to be operated in a lane designated for the exclusive use of HOVs regardless of the occupancy of the vehicle.

These existing state laws, by operation of their provisions, become inoperative on the date the federal authorization expires. Existing state law also repeals these provisions on September 30, 2025.

This bill would extend the repeal date of these provisions until January 1, 2027.

Vote: majority Appropriation: no Fiscal Committee: yes Local Program: no

THE PEOPLE OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA DO ENACT AS FOLLOWS:

SECTION 1. It is the intent of the Legislature in enacting this legislation to continue the existing authorizations for ultra-low emission vehicles (ULEVs), super ultra-low emission vehicles (SULEVs), advanced technology partial zero-emission vehicles (AT PZEVs), and transitional zero-emission vehicles (TZEVs) that display a valid identifier issued by the Department of Motor Vehicles to use high-occupancy vehicle (HOV) lanes until the federal authorization expires, including any extensions granted by the federal government beyond September 30, 2025.

SEC. 2. Section 5205.5 of the Vehicle Code is amended to read:

5205.5. (a) (1) For purposes of implementing Section 21655.9, the department shall make available for issuance, for a fee determined by the department to be sufficient to reimburse the department for the reasonable costs incurred pursuant to this section, and pursuant to the eligibility provisions in subdivision (b), distinctive decals, labels, and other identifiers that clearly distinguish the following vehicles from other vehicles:

(A) A vehicle that meets the state's super ultra-low emission vehicle (SULEV) standard for exhaust emissions and the federal inherently low-emission vehicle (ILEV) evaporative emission standard, as defined in Part 88 (commencing with Section 88.101-94) of Title 40 of the Code of Federal Regulations.

(B) A vehicle that was produced during the 2004 model year or earlier and meets the state's ultra-low emission vehicle (ULEV) standard for exhaust emissions and the federal ILEV standard. A decal, label, or other identifier issued pursuant to this paragraph is valid until January 1, 2019.

(C) A vehicle that meets the state's enhanced advanced technology partial zero-emission vehicle (enhanced AT PZEV) standard or transitional zero-emission vehicle (TZEV) standard.

(2) (A) A decal, label, or other identifier issued pursuant to subparagraph (A) or (C) of paragraph (1) before January 1, 2017, is valid until January 1, 2019.

(B) (i) A decal, label, or other identifier issued pursuant to subparagraph (A) or (C) of paragraph (1) on or after January 1, 2017, and before March 1, 2018, is valid until January 1, 2019.

(ii) A decal, label, or other identifier issued pursuant to subparagraph (A) or (C) of paragraph (1) between March 1, 2018, and January 1, 2019, is valid until January 1, 2022.

(iii) A decal, label, or other identifier issued pursuant to subparagraph (A) or (C) of paragraph (1) on or after March 1, 2018, for a vehicle that had been issued a decal, label, or other identifier pursuant to subparagraph (A) or (C) of paragraph (1) between January 1, 2017, and March 1, 2018, is valid until January 1, 2022.

(C) Except as provided in clause (iii) of subparagraph (B), a decal, label, or other identifier issued pursuant to subparagraph (A) or (C) of paragraph (1) on or after January 1, 2019, is valid until January 1 of the fourth year after the year of issuance.

(3) (A) Notwithstanding the validity timeframe specified in clause (iii) of subparagraph (B) of paragraph (2), commencing January 1, 2020, and until January 1, 2024, a decal, label, or other identifier may be issued pursuant to subparagraph (A) or (C) of paragraph (1) for a vehicle that had previously been issued a decal, label, or other identifier, and the decal, label, or other identifier shall be valid until January 1, 2024, if the applicant for the decal, label, or other identifier has a household income at or below 80 percent of the state median income, as designated by the Department of Housing and Community Development's list of state income limits adopted pursuant to Section 50093 of the Health and Safety Code. The determination of income eligibility shall be made by a governmental or nonprofit entity selected by the department, in a format prescribed by the department.

(B) A person who obtained a decal, label, or other identifier for a vehicle prior to January 1, 2017, shall not be issued another decal, label, or other identifier pursuant to this paragraph, notwithstanding the person's qualifying income.

(C) The department shall report to the Legislature the number of decals, labels, and other identifiers issued pursuant to this paragraph. The report shall be issued after January 1, 2023, but before June 1, 2023.

(4) Except as provided in clause (iii) of subparagraph (B) of paragraph (2) and paragraph (3), a vehicle shall not be issued a decal, label, or other identifier more than once.

(b) (1) The department shall not issue a decal, label, or other identifier to an applicant who has received a consumer rebate pursuant to the Clean Vehicle Rebate Project, established as part of the Air Quality Improvement Program pursuant to Article 3 (commencing with Section 44274) of Chapter 8.9 of Part 5 of Division 26 of the Health and Safety Code, for a vehicle purchased on or after January 1, 2018, unless the rebate was issued to a buyer whose gross annual income falls below one hundred fifty thousand dollars (\$150,000) for a person who files a tax return as a single person, two hundred four thousand dollars (\$204,000) for a person who files a tax return as a head of household, and three hundred thousand dollars (\$300,000) for a person who files a joint tax return.

(2) The department shall collaborate with the State Air Resources Board to establish procedures to implement this subdivision, including, but not limited to, all of the following:

(A) The application form for a decal, label, or other identifier issued pursuant to this section and the application for a rebate under the Clean Vehicle Rebate Project shall include a statement indicating that the applicant cannot participate in both programs unless the applicant meets the income restrictions in paragraph (1). Each application shall require the applicant to provide a signature to confirm that the applicant understands this condition.

(B) Notify consumers of the eligibility criteria and conditions using existing education and outreach efforts.

(C) Establish appropriate compliance and enforcement measures.

(D) Establish information sharing between the department and the board to implement the requirements of this subdivision.

(c) The department shall include a summary of the provisions of this section on each motor vehicle registration renewal notice, or on a separate insert, if space is available and the summary can be included without incurring additional printing or postage costs.

(d) The Department of Transportation shall remove individual HOV lanes, or portions of those lanes, during periods of peak congestion from the access provisions provided in subdivision (a), following a finding by the Department of Transportation as follows:

(1) The lane, or portion of the lane, exceeds a level of service C, as discussed in subdivision (b) of Section 65089 of the Government Code.

(2) The operation or projected operation of the vehicles described in subdivision (a) in these lanes, or portions of those lanes, will significantly increase congestion.

(3) The finding shall also demonstrate the infeasibility of alleviating the congestion by other means, including, but not limited to, reducing the use of the lane by noneligible vehicles or further increasing vehicle occupancy.

(e) The State Air Resources Board shall publish and maintain a list of all vehicles eligible for participation in the programs described in this section. The board shall provide that list to the department.

(f) (1) For purposes of subdivision (a), the Department of the California Highway Patrol and the department, in consultation with the Department of Transportation, shall design and specify the placement of the decal, label, or other identifier on the vehicle. Each decal, label, or other identifier issued for a vehicle shall display a unique number, which shall be printed on, or affixed to, the vehicle registration.

(2) Except as provided in clause (iii) of subparagraph (B) of paragraph (2) of subdivision (a), decals, labels, or other identifiers issued pursuant to subparagraph (A) or (C) of paragraph (1) of subdivision (a) before January 1, 2019, shall be distinguishable from the decals, labels, or other identifiers issued on or after January 1, 2019.

(g) If the Metropolitan Transportation Commission, serving as the Bay Area Toll Authority, grants toll-free and reduced-rate passage on toll bridges under its jurisdiction to a vehicle pursuant to Section 30102.5 of the Streets and Highways Code, it shall also grant the same toll-free and reduced-rate passage to a vehicle displaying a valid identifier issued by the department pursuant to subparagraph (A) or (B) of paragraph (1) of subdivision (a).

(h) (1) Notwithstanding Section 21655.9, and except as provided in paragraph (2), a vehicle described in subdivision (a) that displays a valid decal, label, or identifier issued pursuant to this section shall be granted a toll-free or reduced-rate passage in high-occupancy toll lanes as described in Section 149.7 of the Streets and Highways Code unless prohibited by federal law.

(2) (A) Paragraph (1) does not apply to the imposition of a toll imposed for passage on a toll road or toll highway, that is not a high-occupancy toll lane as described in Section 149.7 of the Streets and Highways Code.

(B) Paragraph (1) does not apply to the imposition of a toll charged for crossing a state-owned bridge.

(i) If the Director of Transportation determines that federal law does not authorize the state to allow vehicles that are identified by distinctive decals, labels, or other identifiers on vehicles described in subdivision (a) to use highway lanes or highway access ramps for high-occupancy vehicles regardless of vehicle occupancy, the Director of Transportation shall submit a notice of that determination to the Secretary of State.

(j) This section shall become inoperative on the date the federal authorization pursuant to Section 166 of Title 23 of the United States Code expires, or the date the Secretary of State receives the notice described in subdivision (i), whichever occurs first.

(k) If this section becomes inoperative pursuant to subdivision (j) the driver of a vehicle with an otherwise valid decal, label, or other identifier issued pursuant to this section shall not be cited for a violation of Section 21655.9 within 60 days of the date that this section becomes inoperative.

(l) This section shall remain in effect only until January 1, 2027, and as of that date is repealed.

SEC. 3. Section 21655.9 of the Vehicle Code is amended to read:

21655.9. (a) (1) Whenever the Department of Transportation or a local authority authorizes or permits exclusive or preferential use of highway lanes or highway access ramps for high-occupancy vehicles pursuant to Section 21655.5, the use of those lanes or ramps shall also be extended to vehicles that are issued distinctive decals, labels, or other identifiers pursuant to Section 5205.5 regardless of vehicle occupancy or ownership.

(2) A local authority during periods of peak congestion shall suspend for a lane the access privileges extended pursuant to paragraph (1) for those vehicles issued distinctive decals, labels, or other identifiers pursuant to Section 5205.5, if a periodic

review of lane performance by that local authority discloses both of the following factors regarding the lane:

(A) The lane, or a portion of the lane, exceeds a level of service C, as described in subdivision (b) of Section 65089 of the Government Code.

(B) The operation or projected operation of vehicles in the lane, or a portion of the lane, will significantly increase congestion.

(b) A person shall not drive a vehicle described in subdivision (a) of Section 5205.5 with a single occupant upon a high-occupancy vehicle lane pursuant to this section unless the decal, label, or other identifier issued pursuant to Section 5205.5 is properly displayed on the vehicle, and the vehicle registration described in Section 5205.5 is with the vehicle.

(c) A person shall not operate or own a vehicle displaying a decal, label, or other identifier, as described in Section 5205.5, if that decal, label, or identifier was not issued for that vehicle pursuant to Section 5205.5. A violation of this subdivision is a misdemeanor.

(d) If the provisions in Section 5205.5 authorizing the department to issue decals, labels, or other identifiers to hybrid and alternative fuel vehicles become inoperative, vehicles displaying those decals, labels, or other identifiers shall not access high-occupancy vehicle lanes without meeting the occupancy requirements otherwise applicable to those lanes.

(e) (1) This section shall become inoperative on the date the federal authorization pursuant to Section 166 of Title 23 of the United States Code expires, or the date the Secretary of State receives the notice described in subdivision (i) of Section 5205.5, whichever occurs first.

(2) With respect to a vehicle described in subparagraph (B) of paragraph (1) of subdivision (a) of Section 5205.5, this section shall become inoperative on January 1, 2019.

(f) (1) The Department of Transportation shall prepare and submit a report to the Legislature on or before December 1, 2017, on the degradation status of high-occupancy vehicle lanes on the state highway system.

(2) The requirement that a report be submitted pursuant to paragraph (1) shall be inoperative on December 1, 2021, pursuant to Section 10231.5 of the Government Code.

(3) A report submitted pursuant to paragraph (1) shall be submitted in compliance with Section 9795 of the Government Code.

(g) This section shall remain in effect only until January 1, 2027, and as of that date is repealed.