

Proposed CA Legislation Enables Establishment of NEV Transportation Plan

Allows NEVs on Higher Speed Roads, Could Lead To Greater Access Within Communities for Residents

A pending California bill would formalize the use of neighborhood electric vehicles (NEVs) on local streets and even some higher speed roads, giving NEV owners greater flexibility in where they can operate these vehicles.

AB 2353, believed to be the first bill of its kind in the U.S., would allow California communities to retool their current golf car transportation plan into one that applies to all low-speed vehicles. Within the restrictions set in the local NEV plan, the vehicles could travel along state roads with a posted speed limit of 35 mph or less and in a striped, designated NEV lane along roads with a higher speed limit. Any NEV transportation plan would be subject to the approval of the local transportation planning and law enforcement agencies.

The change in California law is being sought by residents of Lincoln, CA and other similar communities in which NEV ownership is increasing, but no coordinated system of NEV-friendly routes exists. For example, to access many points downtown, Lincoln residents must use their conventional vehicles, as NEVs are not allowed to cross U.S. 65, which separates many neighborhoods from the downtown area. Under existing law, anyone who operates a golf cart on other than an authorized roadway can be fined up to \$100.

NEVs are popular with Lincoln's elderly residents for many reasons: they can be used for travel on both the street and the golf course; they are reasonably priced,

just slightly higher than the cost for a golf cart; they are easier to maneuver than a full-size automobile; and the no-emissions electric vehicles create no air pollution.

The proposed legislation is drawing support from area metropolitan planning organizations, such as the Sacramento

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A typical NEV used by Lincoln, CA residents. (Photo: Lincoln Hills LSV Group.)

Higher Fines Plus Points Effective in Reducing HOV Violations

Virginia Latest To Impose Stricter Fines

Virginia has joined a growing number of states who have determined that, in conjunction with increased enforcement, the only way to decrease violations on high-occupancy vehicle (HOV) lanes is to impose strict fines and possibly add points on violators' licenses.

Legislation passed by the Virginia legislature and expected to be signed into law by the governor doubles the fines for second or more offenses. By the third offense, violators are fined \$500 plus three negative points on their driving record; for fourth and subsequent offenses, they are

fined \$1,000 plus the three negative points.

For several years, California has maintained low violation rates because of its stiff fine, currently at a minimum of \$341. Signs stating the minimum fine are posted along HOV facilities to discourage potential violators. The low violation rates can also be contributed to the state's policy of increasing law enforcement activity along any portion of an HOV facility with a violation rate greater than 10%.

A 2002 Minnesota DOT study (www.dot.state.mn.us/informa-

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Area Council of Governments, Lincoln expects to be the first U.S. community to draft an NEV transportation master plan. Already many of the city's residents are choosing to purchase NEVs over golf carts and new city businesses are adding charging and parking facilities for NEVs. The city's chamber of commerce is backing the legislation as a measure that encourages residents to patronize local businesses within the NEV-access area.

Recommended elements of the transportation plan include

- Designated travel routes for NEVs on low-speed state and local roads
- Designated NEV travel lanes on higher speed roads
- Coordination with long-range transportation improvement plan
- Provision for NEV-related access points and crossings, including overpasses to allow vehicles to safely traverse higher speed highways
- Provision for parking and charging facilities

In the draft legislation, a Class I NEV two-way route would be used exclusively by NEVs, bicycles, and pedestrians, and be 12 feet wide with a 2-foot graded shoulder;

a Class II route would provide for a separate striped lane adjacent to roadways with speed limits of 55 mph or less, with a suggested width of 7 feet; and a Class III route would consist of travel lanes with a speed limit of 35 mph or less, shared with conventional traffic.

AB 2353 also includes language supporting efforts by the Division of Motor Vehicles and the California Highway Patrol to develop a new classification of license specifically for NEV drivers; current law dictates that drivers of golf cart-type vehicles must have a full vehicle license. The new classification could mean improved mobility for older citizens who no longer qualify for a full vehicle license, but who could meet requirements for the NEV-restricted license.

NEVs eligible to use NEV lanes have to meet all safety requirements for low-speed vehicles established by federal regulations in 1988.

More information is available from Assembly Member Tim Leslie, sponsor of AB 2353, tel. (916) 319-2004, e-mail: Assemblymember.Leslie@assembly.ca.gov, or from Annie Embree, an attorney helping to draft the model law, tel. (530) 887-8585.