

SB 288: Sustainable Transportation and the “Road to Recovery” for Post-COVID Air Pollution and Unemployment Concerns

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At the end of the 2020 legislative session, California Governor Newsom signed [Senate Bill 288](#) (Wiener)[1] (SB 288) into law. SB 288, amends the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), streamlining the environmental review process for: (i) specific transportation-related projects, including bus rapid transit projects, light rail service projects, construction or maintenance of charging or refueling stations for zero-emission buses; (ii) projects that improve customer information and wayfinding for transit riders, bicyclists, or pedestrians; (iii) city or county projects designed to minimize parking requirements; and (iv) similar transportation oriented projects. Specifically, SB 288 designates these projects necessary to facilitate development of sustainable transportation alternatives and related infrastructure, encouraging broader use of sustainable transit throughout the state. Due to this designation, SB 288 exempts these projects from CEQA review as categorical exemptions beginning January 1, 2021. SB 288 is slated to sunset on January 1, 2030. In addition, SB 288 extends the existing exemption for bicycle transportation plans (including restriping of streets and highways, bicycle parking and storage, signage, and related improvements to intersection operations) from the existing sunset date[2] to January 1, 2030.

As the discourse about climate change and air pollution grows louder, strategic investment in transit infrastructure may help California bridge the gap between existing greenhouse gas emissions and air quality goals. Additionally, transportation-related infrastructure projects are expected to generate significant opportunities for California's 1.6 million transportation workers, whose livelihoods are increasingly threatened by the city-wide and county-wide closures implemented in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Transportation projects, like those listed above, are expected to generate between 10 and 13 transportation jobs per million dollars of investment, in addition to the jobs generated during construction.

Although it is too early to determine the full scope of COVID-related social and economic impacts, these impacts are felt acutely at the local level as cities and counties try to achieve more with less. SB 288 provides a clear approach to alleviating some of this burden while pointing state policy towards a brighter, more sustainable future.

FOOTNOTES

[1] California Environmental Quality Act: Exemptions: Transportation-Related Projects

[2] January 1, 2021

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