

Bill Targets Driving With Cats on Lap

Pending California legislation seeks to eliminate drivers' pet distractions.

By Soraya Gutierrez

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A cat sits in a car as his owner looks on. Cats and driving don't mix, according to pending legislation in California. A cat resting on the lap of its owner might lead to a citation on California roads if a bill that cleared its first legislative review early this week becomes law. The message from the bill's author to motorists: Cats and driving don't mix.

Assemblyman Bill Maze, R-Visalia, authored Assembly Bill 2233, which aims to prohibit drivers from carrying a live animal on their laps while behind the wheel.

A citation would be issued by the California Highway Patrol for a standard traffic violation, said Laurie Paredes, Maze's legislative director. Violators would face the default penalty for a vehicle code violation, she said. The base fine for vehicle infractions is \$35.

"We're not anticipating that there will be a problem," she said of getting the bill to clear the necessary hurdles, including the Assembly Appropriations Committee next week. "We don't have any formal opposition."

Such legislation is needed, Paredes said, because current laws do not specifically address the problem. "Our department of DMV states that distractions account for one of four traffic accidents," she said.

The alternative to sharing the driver's seat with a cat is at the discretion of motorists, she said, adding, "We are not mandating any tethering or caging of animals."

Tom Marshall, CHP spokesman, said statistics are not available on drivers who sit their pets on their laps. If the bill is enacted into the law, however, he said officers would start to keep track of the violations.

"If we see you, we can pull you over," he said, adding that the driver would then be subject to a citation. "We rarely, if ever, put our police dogs on our laps when we're on patrol."

While the bill is intended to help keep motorists and others on the road safe, it is always best to keep cats and other animals safely restrained while in a car to prevent injury if an accident occurs.