Summary of Vehicle Weight Safety Study Task Force Findings (Assembly Bill 251)

December 12, 2025

CALIFORNIA
TRANSPORTATION
COMMISSION

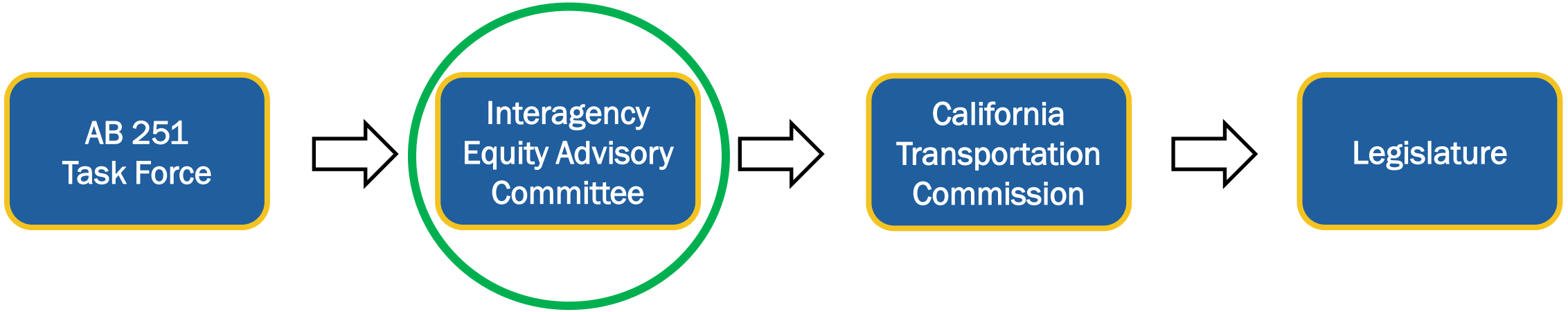
Presentation Overview

- Legislative Background
- Task Force Process
- Summary of Task Force Findings
- Questions for Feedback

Legislative Background

- The Legislature passed AB 251 in 2023, requiring the Commission to convene a task force to study:
  - The relationship between vehicle weight, vulnerable road user injuries and fatalities, and degradation of road infrastructure;
  - Potential costs and benefits of a passenger vehicle weight fee to offset unreasonable impacts; and
  - Equity considerations to account for different populations, demographic groups, incomes, and professions statewide
- The Commission must submit a report to the Legislature detailing the findings of the study including any legislative recommendations.
- The Commission is seeking the EAC's feedback on the Task Force findings to inform its report to the Legislature.
- The Task Force findings are available on the Commission's website here: https://catc.ca.gov/programs/vehicle-weight-safety-study

Process to Develop the Report to the Legislature



Task Force:

- *Review research*
- *Report out summary of findings to Commission*

EAC:

- *Provide feedback on Task Force findings **(today and ongoing)***

CTC:

- *Develop report to Legislature based on Task Force findings and EAC feedback*

Study Timeline

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Task Force Membership

Approved by the Commission in December 2024

ORGANIZATION	TYPE
California Office of Traffic Safety	State Agency
California Department of Motor Vehicles	State Agency
California Highway Patrol	State Agency
California City Transportation Initiative	Local Agency Consortium
California State Association of Counties	Local Agency consortium
Alliance for Automotive Innovation	Automotive Industry
California New Car Dealers Association	Automotive Industry
American Automobile Association (AAA)	Automotive Industry
Streets for All	Road User Safety Organization
American Association of Retired Persons (AARP)	Road User Safety Organization
Active San Gabriel Valley	Road User Safety Organization
National Federation of the Blind of California	Road User Safety Organization
Safe Streets Research	Research Organization
California Farm Bureau	Business/Labor Organization
United Contractors	Business/Labor Organization

Task Force Process

- Each Task Force Meeting included:
  - Presentation of UC Berkeley academic research;
  - Task Force roundtable discussion of research key takeaways; and
  - Public comment
- A summary of each meeting was presented at each subsequent meeting and rolled-up into the summary presented today.
- The Task Force process aimed to summarize the breadth of Task Force perspectives rather than build consensus.

Today's Presentation

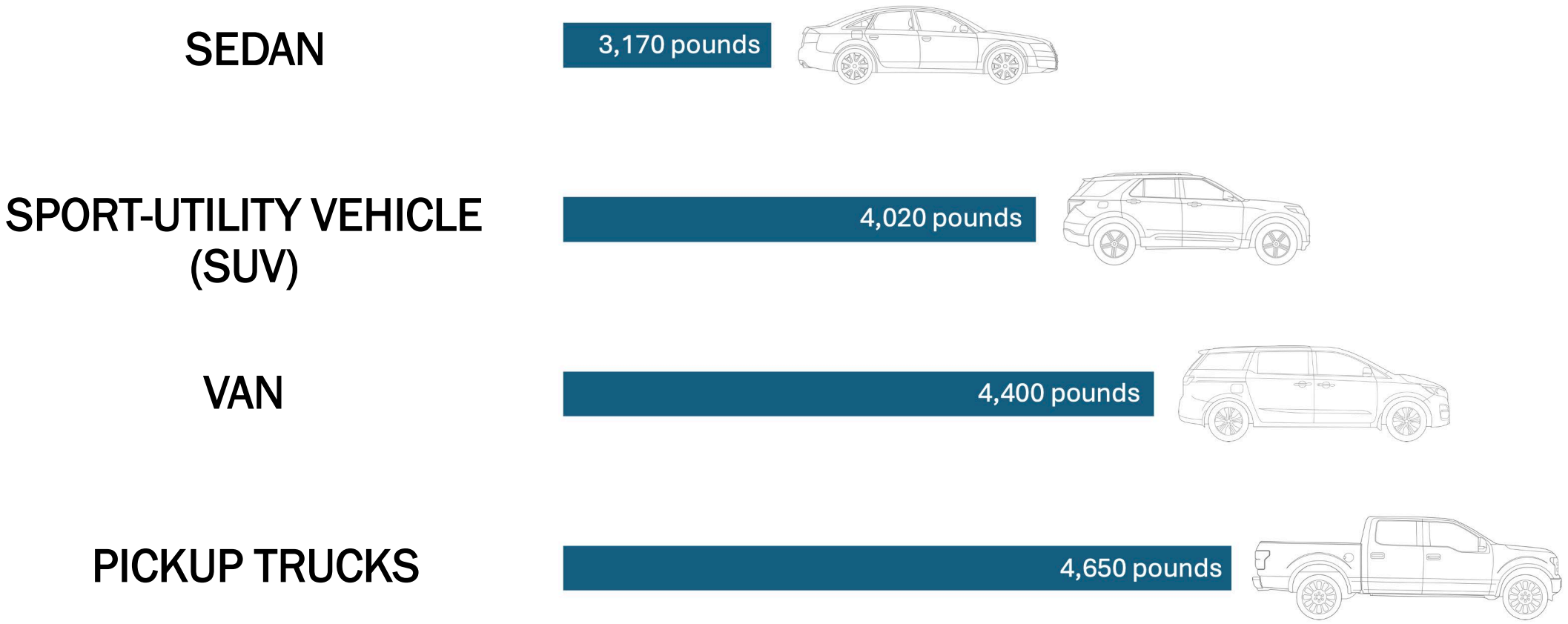
Today staff will present the Task Force findings and seek your input for the Commission's report to the Legislature

Summary of Task Force Findings

The remaining slides identify key takeaways from the University of California, Berkeley's research and feedback from Task Force members and the public regarding topics below:

1. California Vehicle Fleet Trends
2. California Injury and Fatality Trends
3. Potential Regulatory Responses
4. Potential Built Environment Responses
5. Vehicle Weight and Road Degradation
6. Potential Weight-Based Fee Responses
7. Consumer Behavior Response

Passenger Vehicle Types and Average Weight



Data: California DMV, 2023

Questions for Feedback

1) What questions do you have on the Task Force findings presented today?

2) Based on the findings presented, what should the Commission consider in its report to the Legislature?

1. California Vehicle Fleet Trends Key Takeaways

- Since the 1980s **passenger vehicle weight continues to increase** across all vehicle classes and fuel types.
- **SUVs are expected to overtake sedans** as the most registered vehicle in California in urban, rural, and suburban areas.
- People are holding onto their vehicles longer, which **can delay adoption of newer vehicles with improved safety features** (Advanced Driver Assistance Systems).

2. California Injury & Fatality Trends Key Takeaways

- **Sedans cause the majority of pedestrian and bicyclist fatalities and serious injuries in urban and rural areas.** Sedans are the most registered vehicle type in California.

- **SUVs** are the **fastest growing** vehicle type involved in crashes involving vulnerable road users.

- Despite evidence of increasing fatalities and serious injuries for vulnerable road users, **a causal relationship between vehicle weight and fatality and serious injury trends could not be identified** due to the **difficulty in isolating vehicle weight or any singular variable** in a crash as a primary factor.

2. California Injury & Fatality Trends Key Takeaways continued

- Vehicle collisions trends since 2010:

pedestrian fatalities +71% increase	**pedestrian serious injuries +44% increase**
bicyclist serious injuries +20% increase	bicyclist fatalities remain constant

- **Children pedestrians are 82% more likely to be killed** if struck by a **SUV** versus a sedan.

- When adjusting for population, **pedestrian fatalities and serious injuries in disadvantaged areas are approximately 50% higher for all vehicle types.**

2. California Injury & Fatality Trends Key Takeaways continued

- Task Force members questioned the degree to which **other factors may or may not influence collision trends presented such as road user behaviors, distractions, licensing standards, vehicle age, rideshare services, and autonomous vehicles.**

3. Potential Regulatory Responses Key Takeaways

- Historically, **passenger vehicle safety** focused on vehicle occupants and **not those outside of a vehicle**.
- Countries similar to the U.S. require **vehicle testing for pedestrian collision outcomes**.
- Task Force members discussed other aspects of **the safe system approach** (improving infrastructure, driver licensing standards and education, traffic safety laws, enforcement, other) that might also **reduce fatalities and serious injuries of vulnerable road users**.

4. Potential Built Environment Responses Key Takeaways

- **Risk and severity of crashes** involving vulnerable road users could be reduced by: emphasizing the **safe system approach**, **effective roadway design**, and **investment in infrastructure.**

- **Barriers to infrastructure improvements** for vulnerable road users include: **limited funding**, implementing **projects at scale**, and **jurisdictional challenges**.

- **Inequities resulting from investments in the built environment** may include: **less funding in disadvantaged or rural** areas; **accelerated gentrification and displacement**.

5. Vehicle Weight and Road Degradation Key Takeaways

- **Passenger vehicles, including battery electric and fuel cell engines, have a very minor effect on pavement damage and rehabilitation costs** when compared to large multi-axle commercial vehicles - so much so that they are **excluded from consideration from Caltrans' pavement damage calculations.**
  - Therefore, **incremental increases in passenger vehicle weight are not anticipated to have a significant impact on road degradation.**

6. Potential Weight-Based Fee Responses Key Takeaways

- Weight-based passenger vehicle fee could most easily be structured:
  - as an **annual vehicle registration fee** OR a fee at **point-of-purchase**
  - the **same across all vehicles** OR **different based on various factors,** including fuel type, occupation, disability, income, etc.
- Some Task Force members supported a fee to **fund safety improvements for vulnerable road users** or to **subsidize lighter weight vehicles, bicycles, and transit.**
- Some Task Force members did **not support a fee**, citing the **lack of a strong causal relationship between vehicle weight and negative safety outcomes for vulnerable road users**, **affordability concerns** and political feasibility.

7. Consumer Behavior Response Key Takeaways

- Consumer purchase behavior could change more in response to a **larger one-time fee** than a smaller annual fee and generally result in:
  - **steeper decline in the heaviest passenger vehicles purchased** across **all fuel types**
  - generate **more revenue**
  - consumers could switch to lighter vehicles or hold on to their current vehicles longer to avoid this fee
- **Exemptions from a fee could substantially lower revenues**
- Task Force members discussed **how a fee may or may not address the goals of the study.**

Questions for Feedback

1) What questions do you have on the Task Force findings presented today?

2) Based on the findings presented, what should the Commission consider in its report to the Legislature?

Study Timeline

Thank you

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