

Introduced by Senator Hurtado

February 20, 2025

An act to add Section 21241.5 to the Public Utilities Code, relating to aeronautics.

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

SB 661, as introduced, Hurtado. Aeronautics: County of Kern: Meadows Field Airport.

The State Aeronautics Act requires the Department of Transportation, among other things, to encourage, foster, and assist the development of aeronautics in this state and to encourage the establishment of airports and air navigation facilities. The act requires the department to cooperate and assist the federal government, political subdivisions of this state, and others in the development of aeronautics, and to seek to coordinate their aeronautical activities.

This bill would require the department to develop a plan to increase flight availability at Meadows Field Airport in the County of Kern. The bill would require the department, in developing the plan, to collaborate with the County of Kern, relevant state agencies, and with local and federal partners. The bill would require the plan to include, among others, a market study that identifies high-priority routes and assesses demand for additional flights to and from Meadows Field Airport.

This bill would make legislative findings and declarations as to the necessity of a special statute for County of Kern, the City of Bakersfield, and Meadows Field Airport.

To the extent that this bill would require a local entity to participate in the development of the plan, this bill would impose a state-mandated local program.

The California Constitution requires the state to reimburse local agencies and school districts for certain costs mandated by the state. Statutory provisions establish procedures for making that reimbursement.

This bill would provide that, if the Commission on State Mandates determines that the bill contains costs mandated by the state, reimbursement for those costs shall be made pursuant to the statutory provisions noted above.

Vote: majority. Appropriation: no. Fiscal committee: yes.
State-mandated local program: yes.

The people of the State of California do enact as follows:

- 1 SECTION 1. (a) The Legislature finds and declares all of the
2 following:
- 3 (1) The City of Bakersfield is one of the fastest growing
4 metropolitan areas in California, with a population exceeding
5 400,000 people, and serves as the hub of the County of Kern, an
6 economic powerhouse driven by agriculture, energy, logistics, and
7 healthcare industries.
- 8 (2) Enhanced air transportation services, both public and private,
9 are critical to supporting economic development in the County of
10 Kern by improving connectivity for residents, businesses, and
11 visitors.
- 12 (3) The availability of increased flights to the County of Kern
13 will create significant opportunities for local job creation,
14 particularly in industries such as:
- 15 (A) Aviation and airport operations, including roles in ground
16 services, maintenance, and customer support.
- 17 (B) Hospitality and tourism, as better connectivity attracts
18 conferences, business travel, and leisure visitors to the region.
- 19 (C) Logistics and supply chain management, which rely on
20 efficient air cargo services to support local businesses and
21 industries.
- 22 (D) Construction and infrastructure development, as investments
23 are made in airport facilities and surrounding areas.
- 24 (4) Job creation in the County of Kern is especially critical for
25 addressing the unique challenges faced by the county, including,
26 but not limited to, all of the following:
- 27 (A) Higher than average unemployment rates in comparison to
28 the state average.

1 (B) Economic disparities in rural and underserved communities
2 that would benefit from increased connectivity to statewide and
3 national opportunities.

4 (C) The need to diversify the economy and provide stable
5 employment opportunities outside of traditional industries such as
6 oil and gas.

7 (5) Expanding flight access to the County of Kern will
8 strengthen the region's competitiveness by attracting new
9 businesses and investment, fostering innovation, and encouraging
10 young professionals to stay in the area rather than seeking
11 opportunities elsewhere.

12 (6) Improved connectivity also directly supports key industries
13 in the County of Kern, such as agriculture and energy, by providing
14 quicker and more efficient access to clients, suppliers, and markets
15 throughout California, the nation, and the world.

16 (7) As California continues to emphasize equitable economic
17 development, regional air transportation access should align with
18 the needs of underserved and emerging areas, such as County of
19 Kern, to ensure statewide economic resiliency and inclusivity.

20 (b) It is the intent of the Legislature that this legislation does
21 all of the following:

22 (1) Facilitates increased public and private investments to
23 expand the number of flights to and from the County of Kern,
24 including domestic and international routes, to better serve the
25 region's growing population and economic potential.

26 (2) Encourages partnerships among local governments, the
27 aviation industry, and private stakeholders to improve infrastructure
28 at the Meadows Field Airport, near the City of Bakersfield in the
29 County of Kern, and other related facilities, ensuring the region is
30 well-equipped to support increased flight capacity.

31 (3) Explores incentives and grants to attract airlines to add new
32 routes or increase frequency of existing flights to the County of
33 Kern, particularly targeting underserved or high-demand routes.

34 (4) Prioritizes the creation of local, high-quality jobs in aviation,
35 airport operations, hospitality, and associated industries as part of
36 any expansion plan, ensuring that the economic benefits directly
37 support residents of the County of Kern.

38 (5) Promotes economic development through enhanced air
39 connectivity, including attracting conferences, trade shows, and
40 other large-scale events to the region.

(6) Recognizes the importance of air travel as a means to improve access to healthcare, education, and business opportunities for residents of the County of Kern, especially for rural and underserved communities.

(7) Establishes a statewide task force or advisory committee to identify and address barriers to expanding air transportation in the County of Kern, with an emphasis on ensuring that such expansion benefits local businesses, residents, and underserved communities.

(8) Evaluates and mitigates potential environmental impacts associated with increased air travel to ensure alignment with California's sustainability and climate goals.

SEC. 2. Section 21241.5 is added to the Public Utilities Code, to read:

21241.5. (a) The department shall develop a plan to increase flight availability at Meadows Field Airport in the County of Kern.

(b) In developing the plan, the department shall collaborate with the County of Kern, relevant state agencies, and with local and federal partners.

(c) The plan shall include all of the following:

(1) A market study that identifies high-priority routes and assesses demand for additional flights to and from Meadows Field Airport.

(2) Funding mechanisms to support infrastructure upgrades, workforce development, and airline incentives. The funding mechanisms may include, but shall not be limited to, federal grants, state budget allocations, and private sector investments.

(3) Local hiring initiatives and workforce training programs to ensure that residents of the County of Kern, including historically underserved communities, are qualified and competitive for new job opportunities generated by increased flight availability.

(4) A plan to align training programs with the skills needed in industries such as aviation, logistics, hospitality, and construction. In addition to the entities described in subdivision (b), the department, in developing the plan, shall work with local business leaders, educational institutions, and workforce development boards to align training programs.

(5) Performance metrics to evaluate the success of increased flight availability and its impact on the local economy, with a focus on job creation, business growth, and regional competitiveness.

1 SEC. 3. The Legislature finds and declares that a special statute
2 is necessary and that a general statute cannot be made applicable
3 within the meaning of Section 16 of Article IV of the California
4 Constitution because of the unique challenges faced by the County
5 of Kern, the City of Bakersfield, and Meadows Field Airport.

6 SEC. 4. If the Commission on State Mandates determines that
7 this act contains costs mandated by the state, reimbursement to
8 local agencies and school districts for those costs shall be made
9 pursuant to Part 7 (commencing with Section 17500) of Division
10 4 of Title 2 of the Government Code.