

The California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) is a state law that requires full analysis, public disclosure, and where feasible, mitigation of environmental impacts from state and local government projects, including permits for private development. I've written [before](#) about the problematic nature of exempting specific projects from CEQA. In general, my concern is that once you start exempting specific projects, you create a political dynamic where other project proponents want those exemptions – and eventually the only projects that are covered by CEQA are politically unpopular ones (or more accurately, projects that don't have politically powerful sponsors). But of course, there's no reason to assume that the projects that are exempted from CEQA really are more environmentally beneficial than the ones that aren't.

Apparently, it's CEQA exemption season again in the state legislature, and the latest proposal is a doozy. First was a proposal to exempt a new arena for a professional basketball team (the Clippers) in Los Angeles from CEQA. (Sports arenas are a [favorite target](#) for CEQA exemptions – not because they are environmentally friendly, but because they have powerful political allies.) Then a state legislator [tacked on a broad exemption for all public transportation projects in Los Angeles](#) that might be associated with the holding the Olympics in Los Angeles in 2028. It even includes parking lots! It's [literally that broad](#):

activities or approvals for the construction of transportation facilities or activities necessary to enhance the accessibility of the Olympic games are exempt from [CEQA] if a legislative or governing body of a lead agency determines that both of the following are met:

(I) The transportation facilities or activities are in furtherance of the bidding, hosting, funding, or carrying out of Olympic games that have been announced by the International Olympic Committee.

(II) The Olympic games are reasonably expected to occur within 10 years of the approval of the transportation facilities or activities in the County of Los Angeles.

(ii) For purposes of this subparagraph, "transportation facilities or activities" includes any of the following:

(I) One or more new or renovated fixed guideway local transportation systems, such as busway, rail, street car, airport ground access, or monorail, intended to reduce automobile traffic and facilitate access to a regional rail system for a venue of the Olympic games.

(II) Ancillary parking facilities that the lead agency finds will help achieve a “park once” strategy where people can park once and then attend multiple events or activities at nearby facilities or parking to help facilitate access to regional or local public transportation systems or a regional air transport facility.

(III) Infrastructure construction or relocation, such as water, sewer, or electric infrastructure, necessary or convenient for accessing transportation facilities.

This is the kind of exemption that might open the floodgates for every project that has a powerful political backer to avoid CEQA. (See for instance [this article](#) about Facebook and a major real estate developer seeking to get streamlined judicial review of CEQA challenges to their projects.)

Fortunately, it looks like the backers of the LA Olympics bid are already [saying they had nothing to do with the bill](#), and want to [be excluded from it](#). ([Environmental groups are also fighting it.](#)) But even the exemption for the Clippers raises the same concerns, and the potential for long-term harm to California’s environmental laws.