Project Summary: City of Needles Proposed OHMV Master Plan

What this project is:

The City of Needles is advancing a **pilot Off-Highway Motor Vehicle (OHMV) "combined-use highway" network** that allows properly equipped OHMVs (e.g., ATVs/UTVs/dirt bikes that meet California requirements) to operate on **designated city streets** to **connect** residents and visitors to **existing OHV trails/trailheads on federal lands (BLM/USFS), recreational use areas, and local services/lodging**. The pilot authority is provided by **California Vehicle Code (CVC) §38026.2**, *as amended by* **AB 1756 (2026)**, extending the pilot sunset to **January 1, 2034** to which was created specifically for Needles and limits the pilot network to **no more than 10 miles**.

How the route network was developed:

Minagar & Associates evaluated roadway characteristics and operating conditions (lighting, lanes, curvature, sight distance, land uses, etc.) and incorporated **public and stakeholder input** (including BLM and law enforcement). The resulting final approved network totals **9.20 miles** of designated OHMV routes—within the statutory 10-mile limit—subsequent to the **stakeholder coordination and the final City Council approval on September 9, 2025**.

What streets/segments are included (high level):

The approved system is a set of connected street segments intended to link lodging/residential areas, key corridors, and a **BLM interface connection point** (shown on the project figures). The inventory includes a mix of paved segments and at least one unpaved segment (Eagle Pass Rd), with varying posted limits on the underlying streets. The plan anticipates **route-specific signs and controls** so riders can navigate legally and safely and so enforcement is clear.

Core legal framework and operational limits (what makes this "combined-use"):

- Needles may designate combined-use highways **up to 10 miles total** for the pilot.
- **OHMVs must not exceed 35 mph on designated combined-use segments** under the pilot statute (even if the street's normal posted speed differs to be higher. If the posted speed limit is lower, the posted lower speed shall supersede 35 mph).
- **CHP safety finding is required**: the City **cannot designate** a segment unless the **Commissioner of CHP** finds the designation would **not create a potential traffic safety hazard**.

- Combined-use designation generally becomes effective **when appropriate signs are installed** (signage is a key "go-live" condition).

Implementation plan elements (what happens after Council approval):

After City Council approval, the plan calls for an implementation program including:

1. **Street signage and traffic control devices** (Begin/End OHMV Route, directional arrows, speed control, warning/yield messaging, etc., consistent with CA MUTCD),
2. **Public education and outreach** for residents and riders (mailers, website map/FAQ, social media reminders, public meeting/open house, complaint/feedback portal),
3. **Enforcement coordination** (training, maps, citation guidance, targeted enforcement on high-use weekends), and
4. **Compliance requirements** emphasizing **vehicle identification/registration, insurance (financial responsibility), and licensing/helmet rules**.

Visitor services, lodging, and local quality-of-life:

The report highlights that the OHMV network is designed to connect to **lodging and services**, supporting tourism and local economic activity. It also flags practical local governance issues—especially **short-term lodging (e.g., Airbnb)**—noting there is no single state law that ties OHMV access to short-term rentals, so Needles may need a **local policy approach** (registration, disclosure of OHMV rules to guests, quiet hours/parking standards, and targeted enforcement) to reduce neighborhood impacts.

Staging areas (proposed trailhead-style access points):

To reduce "informal unloading" on neighborhood streets and concentrate compliance messaging, the plan identifies potential staging areas near:

- **Jack Smith Park & River Road:** Trailer Parking, Loading/Unloading Zone & Restrooms
- **Clary Drive & Lillyhill Drive:** Trailhead Access & Signage

Reporting and pilot timeline:
State law requires Needles (with CHP/Caltrans/Parks & Recreation and others) to evaluate and report on the pilot by **January 1, 2033**, including safety, traffic flow impacts, OHV usage changes, incursions/off-route impacts, and public comments. Additional reporting on environmental/neighboring impacts is also due by **January 1, 2033.** The pilot statute is scheduled to remain in effect **until January 1, 2034**.

Citizen + Visitor FAQ (rules, regulations, and practical "how-to"):

1) Is OHMV riding allowed everywhere in Needles now?

No. OHMV operation on city streets is only legal on **designated OHMV routes** upon the City Council approval of the plan **and** required signage/controls are installed. Riding off-route on non-designated streets is subject to enforcement.

2) How long is the proposed OHMV street network?

The proposed combined-use network totals **9.20 miles**, which fits under the statutory cap of **10 miles** for the Needles pilot project.

3) What's the maximum speed for OHMVs on the designated routes?

35 mph maximum for OHMVs unless posted lower on any roadway designated under the pilot master plan, regardless of the street's standard posted speed. Riders must also obey any lower posted speed limits and operate safely for conditions.

4) When do the routes officially "go live"?

Combined-use segments become effective when the City installs **approved signs/markers/traffic control devices** and after the required safety review process is complete (including the **NPD/CHP safety finding**).

5) Do I need a driver's license to operate an OHMV on these city streets?

Yes—because these are **public roads/highways (combined-use)**. Operators must meet applicable **driver licensing requirements** for the vehicle type they are operating.

6) Do OHMVs need registration/identification to operate on the designated streets?

Yes. OHMVs subject to California identification requirements must display a valid **OHV identification plate/sticker (commonly red/green sticker or equivalent identification)** as required by California law. Vehicles without required identification are not legal for operation on public roadways as part of this system.

7) Do I need insurance?

Yes. Drivers/owners must be able to show **financial responsibility (insurance or equivalent proof)** and carry evidence in the vehicle (or otherwise be able to establish it as allowed by law). This is a major enforcement and liability topic on public streets.

8) Are helmets required?

Helmets are required under California rules for many OHMV use cases, and the plan specifically anticipates **"Helmet Required"** messaging as part of route signage and public education. When in doubt: **wear a helmet and appropriate protective gear**—and follow the specific rules for your vehicle class and rider age.

9) Can children operate OHMVs on the city routes?

Minors have additional restrictions under state law (including ATV safety certification/training requirements for operators under 18 in many contexts). Practically: if you're under 18, assume you will need to meet **training/certification and supervision requirements** and still comply with licensing/helmet rules applicable to public-road combined-use operation. Families should check age/vehicle-type requirements carefully before riding.

10) What if I'm staying at a hotel—can I ride from my lodging to the trails?

That is one of the core purposes of the plan: connecting **lodging facilities** to the OHMV route network and onward connections to federal trail systems. You must still:

- Stay on the **designated route**,
- Keep OHMV speed **≤ 35 mph**,
- Ensure your vehicle is **properly identified/registered**, and
- Carry **license + insurance proof** as required.

11) What about short-term rentals (Airbnb/VRBO)?

The report notes there is **no single state law** linking OHMV access and short-term rentals; the City may adopt **local rules** (registration, disclosure of route rules to guests, quiet hours, parking standards, and enforcement). Visitors should **not assume** a rental home is located on or near a legal connector route—if you're not on a designated route, riding on neighborhood streets can be illegal.

12) Where will I find the official route map and rules?

The plan recommends a dedicated **City OHMV webpage** with downloadable maps, the local ordinance, rules, and an FAQ—plus QR codes and printed mailers. Until the City publishes the final ordinance/map package, rely on:

- Posted **Begin/End OHMV Route** signs, and
- The City's official published materials.

13) What signage should I look for?

Expect (at minimum):

- **Begin OHMV Route / End OHMV Route** signs
- **Directional arrows** and wayfinding
- **Speed Limit (OHMV max 35 mph)**, unless posted lower
- Warnings like **Yield to Pedestrians**, **Stay on Designated Route**, and hazard advisories in key locations

14) Can I cross highways to reach trails?

Crossing rules are tightly controlled. In many cases, OHMVs may only cross at **designated crossing locations** and must cross quickly and safely. Follow posted crossing signage and any City/Caltrans/CHP-designated crossing points.

15) Will law enforcement enforce these routes?

Yes. The implementation strategy specifically calls for law enforcement coordination, training, and targeted enforcement—especially during high-use weekends/holidays—to address speed, off-route riding, equipment compliance, and nuisance behavior.

16) What are the most common violations visitors should avoid?

- Riding **off the designated route network**
- Operate an OHV on designated routes during the **hours of darkness**
- Operation of an OHV on the highway during the **hours of darkness**
- Exceeding **35 mph** (OHMV cap) and **posted lower speed limits within the City's residential streets**
- Operate without **rubber tires**
- Operate without **street-legal equipment as required by law, including an operational stoplight (brake light)**
- No proof of **insurance/financial responsibility**
- Missing required **OHV identification/registration**
- Operating without proper **license/endorsement** (as applicable)
- Unsafe operation near pedestrians/residential areas (noise, dust, reckless driving)
- Not compliance with CVC §38026.5

17) What are other safety tips?

OHMV riders will be operating on public roadways alongside:

- Pedestrians
- Bicyclists
- Passenger vehicles
- Commercial trucks

Riders must:

✓ Drive cautiously
✓ Yield to pedestrians
✓ Obey all traffic laws
✓ Operate defensively
✓ Maintain full situational awareness

Unsafe or reckless operation may result in citations and jeopardize the future of the program.

18)What are the benefits for residents? What about neighborhood impacts?

Benefits emphasized include improved legal access, reduced trespass onto private land, better resource protection, and visitor spending. To manage impacts, the plan emphasizes signage, staged access points, education, and enforcement—plus possible local policy tools for noise, dust, and short-term lodging.

19) Is this permanent?

It is a **pilot** authorized in California state law, with required evaluation reports due **January 1, 2033**, and the pilot statute scheduled to sunset **January 1, 2034** unless extended.

Practical "Visitor Rules" cheat sheet (easy-to-share):

- **Only ride on designated OHMV routes** (look for Begin/End signs).
- **Max OHMV speed = 35 mph** on pilot-designated streets, unless posted lower.
- Bring and be ready to show: **driver's license**, **insurance proof**, **OHV ID/registration**.
- Unlawful to operate an OHV on designated routes during the **hours of darkness.**
- Unlawful to operate without **street-legal equipment as required by law, including an operational stoplight (brake light).**
- Unlawful to operate without **rubber tires.**
- **Helmet + safety gear strongly expected** (and legally required in many cases).
- **Yield to pedestrians**, ride quietly through neighborhoods, and **don't roost dust**.
- Use designated **staging areas** when available; don't unload in neighborhoods.
- If you're unsure, **don't ride that street**—find the signed route.

FAQ into a **two-sided handout** format (Resident side / Visitor side) with shorter answers and “Do / Don’t” bullets, using the same content you provided here.

Ready-to-use, two-sided public handout written in plain language. It is designed so the City can post it online, print it as a flyer, or include it with utility bills or hotel check-ins.

CITY OF NEEDLES, CALIFORNIA

OFF-HIGHWAY MOTOR VEHICLE (OHMV) PILOT PROGRAM

Rules, Routes & Responsibilities

SIDE A — FOR RESIDENTS OF NEEDLES

What is the OHMV Pilot Program?

The City of Needles is implementing a **state-authorized pilot program** that allows Off-Highway Motor Vehicles (OHMVs) to legally use **designated city streets** to connect neighborhoods, lodging, and services to **existing federal OHV trails**.
This program is authorized **only for the City of Needles** under California Vehicle Code §38026.2.

Where are OHMVs allowed?

✅ **ONLY on streets officially designated as OHMV Routes**
🚫 **NOT on all city streets**

All routes are clearly marked with:

- “**Begin OHMV Route**” and “**End OHMV Route**” signs
- Directional arrows
- OHMV speed limit signage

Riding off-route is illegal and enforceable.

Speed, Safety & Neighborhood Protections

- **Maximum OHMV speed: 35 mph unless posted lower**
- Riders must **yield to pedestrians**
- No reckless riding, racing, or excessive noise
- Law enforcement will conduct **targeted enforcement**, especially on weekends and holidays

The program is designed to **reduce illegal riding on neighborhood streets** by directing riders to clearly marked corridors.

Do OHMV riders need licenses and insurance?

Yes. On city streets, OHMV operators must have:

- A **valid driver's license**
- **Proof of insurance / financial responsibility**
- Proper **OHMV registration or identification sticker**
- Required **helmet and safety equipment**

What if there are problems?

The City will maintain:

- A dedicated OHMV information webpage
- A complaint and feedback system
- Ongoing coordination with law enforcement

Residents are encouraged to report:

- Riding off designated routes
- Excessive speed or noise
- Unsafe operation

Is this permanent?

No. This is a **pilot program**.

- Evaluation report due to the State: **January 1, 2033**
- Program sunsets unless extended: **January 1, 2034**

SIDE B — FOR VISITORS & OHMV RIDERS

Welcome to Needles — Ride Legal, Ride Smart

Needles is proud to be one of the **only cities in California** offering legal OHMV street connections to world-class desert trails.

But riding is legal ONLY if you follow the rules below.

Where can I ride?

✅ **Designated OHMV Routes only**
🚫 **No riding on non-designated city streets**

Look for official signs:

- **Begin OHMV Route**
- **End OHMV Route**
- Directional arrows and warnings

If it's not signed — **don't ride it**.

Speed Limit

🚫 **Maximum OHMV speed on city streets: 35 mph**
Lower speeds may apply in specific areas.

What you must have to ride legally

Before riding on city streets, make sure you have:

- ✅ **Valid driver's license**
- ✅ **OHMV registration or CA identification sticker**
- ✅ **Proof of insurance**
- ✅ **Helmet and required safety gear**
- ✅ Street-legal equipment as required by law

Riders without proper documentation may be cited and removed from the route.

Staying at a hotel or lodging?

Many hotels are located near designated OHMV routes. You may ride:

- **From lodging → to designated OHMV routes → to trail systems**
- **ONLY via signed routes**

Short-term rentals (Airbnb, VRBO, etc.) may **not** be located on legal OHMV access streets. Ask before you ride.

Trail Staging Areas

Use designated OHMV staging areas when available to:

- Load and unload OHMVs
- Access route maps and rules
- Reduce impacts on neighborhoods

Do not unload or stage OHMVs on residential streets.

Respect the Community

✓ Yield to pedestrians
✓ Keep noise and dust down
✓ Obey all signs and speed limits

🚫 NO off-route riding
🚫 NO racing or reckless behavior
🚫 NO riding during hours of darkness

🚫 NO operation without operational brake light
🚫 NO operation without rubber tires

⚠ SHARE THE ROAD

You will be riding with pedestrians, bicyclists, passenger vehicles, and commercial trucks. Drive cautiously and obey all traffic laws.

Unsafe or illegal riding threatens the future of the program.

Enforcement

Local law enforcement actively patrols OHMV routes.
Violations may result in:

- Citations
- Fines
- Removal from routes
- Loss of OHMV access privileges

Remember

This OHMV system exists **because riders follow the rules**.
Help keep Needles open, safe, and OHMV-friendly.

June 13, 2026