



DATE: August 25, 2021

Item #4

AGENDA REPORT

TO: Complete Streets Commission
FROM: Guido F. Persicone, Planning Services Manager
SUBJECT Vehicles Miles Traveled (VMT) Policy

RECOMMENDATION:

Provide feedback to City staff regarding the draft vehicle miles traveled VMT policy

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Senate Bill 743 (SB 743) requires local jurisdictions to use Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT) instead of Level of Service (LOS) to analyze transportation impacts under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). City staff is developing a new citywide VMT policy to comply with State law and provide established and consistent criteria for analyzing transportation impacts of development projects and long-range plans. The policy will facilitate the buildout of the General Plan and adopted plans and support new development in suitable areas near transit, mixed-use neighborhoods, and other amenities.

BACKGROUND

In September 2013, the State of California signed into law Senate Bill 743 (SB 743) which changes how transportation impacts should be analyzed under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). In February 2018, the State Office of Planning and Research (OPR) updated the CEQA statute, produced a Technical Guideline, and gave California cities a July 1, 2020 deadline to begin implementing the new law. The law establishes Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT) as the appropriate methodology for measuring transportation environmental impacts. Historically, the City of Los Altos and other jurisdictions have used Level of Service (LOS) as the threshold for analyzing the significance of impacts to transportation infrastructure under CEQA.

As a measure of congestion, LOS assigns a letter grade (A through F) to intersections or roadway segments based on the ability to carry a certain level of traffic. California jurisdictions have been using LOS to analyze a project's CEQA transportation impacts since the inception of CEQA in 1970. California has now shifted away from using LOS because measuring congestion at intersections and along roadway segments can have the unintended consequence of encouraging urban sprawl. Under LOS, road widening and other infrastructure improvements may induce new development to locate in more remote areas, which often results in greater vehicle use and traffic congestion overall because people must travel longer distances to reach destinations.

This is particularly true when employment and residential neighborhoods are located far apart. Although no longer used to measure CEQA transportation impacts, LOS is still required by City Policy and will continue to be used to comply with the State-mandated Congestion Management Program (CMP). The Valley Transportation Agency (VTA) administers the CMP for Santa Clara County and is responsible for overseeing the regional roadway network by also maintaining a LOS standard.

VEHICLE MILES TRAVELED (VMT) DRAFT POLICY

Attachment 1 to this staff report is the draft VMT policy. Please review and be prepared to discuss with City staff and the consultant.

CITY COUNCIL INPUT

On March 31, 2021 a study session with the Complete Streets Commission occurred and several clarification questions were asked of staff and the consultant. Please review Attachment 2 for additional background about VMT and the answers to the questions.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

The action being considered is exempt from environmental review under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to Public Resources Code Section 21080(b)(1) and CEQA Guidelines Section 15268(a), which provides that ministerial actions are exempt from the requirements of CEQA. The proposed implementation of VMT as the methodology for conducting future CEQA analyses is mandated by SB 743 and thus constitutes a ministerial action.

Attachments:

1. Draft VMT Resolution and Policy
2. VMT FAQ and Policy Framework