

SB 743 Environmental Quality Update and Staff Recommendation

In response to the approval of Senate Bill (SB) 743 by the California Legislature in September 2013, the Governor's Office of Planning and Research (OPR) proposed to use vehicle miles traveled (VMT) as the metric to replace the use of vehicular "level of service" (LOS) for the evaluation of project related transportation impacts under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). SB 743 does not preclude local agencies from applying LOS in General Plan policies or in transportation impact analysis studies, however, LOS cannot be applied to the CEQA analysis. OPR anticipates that the new VMT guideline will go into effect in Fall 2018. Between now and when the new guidelines go into effect, Lead Agencies may switch from LOS to VMT anytime. However, the use of the new Guidelines will be mandatory on January 1, 2020.

Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority (VTA) is the Congestion Management Agency (CMA) for the Santa Clara County. Currently, VTA establishes the Transportation Impact Analysis (TIA) Guidelines which are used by the local agencies when analyzing transportation impacts of land development projects on the transportation system. The guidelines are also often used by local agencies as a reference for the Transportation analysis in environmental documents. In the current TIA guidelines, LOS is used to measure transportation performance based on delay and congestion. VTA is currently taking a lead role in developing a work plan for the LOS-to-VMT transition, as well as a guideline for implementing VMT, and the associated thresholds for CEQA analysis in Santa Clara County. The new thresholds will use VMT per capita to measure the total amount of vehicular traffic across the entire system.

VTA has formed a working group which consist of members from the local agencies. City of Sunnyvale is represented by the Transportation and Traffic Manager. VTA and the working group has started to evaluate and identify the methodology to model VMT. By Fall 2018, VTA aims to define a baseline for VMT analysis, as well as the thresholds for significant impacts. Throughout 2019, VTA plans to determine, evaluate and test the sketch tools to project VMT for the various types of projects. VTA aims to adopt a new VMT Analysis Guideline to specify how to analyze VMT by January 1, 2020. The new VMT per capita thresholds will only be applicable to CEQA analysis.

Moving forward, the City plans to follow VTA's lead in the LOS-to-VMT transition, and adopt VTA's methodology and thresholds in using VMT per capita as a metric to evaluate impacts for CEQA analysis. However, to evaluate project impacts on intersections and roadway facilities, the City will continue to use the VTA's TIA Guidelines and LOS as a metric in the traffic impact analysis. The LOS analysis would provide the information needed to evaluate project impacts at the operation level. For locations where the project degrades the facilities to an unacceptable level of service, the LOS analysis would be used as a tool to determine the mitigations needed to bring the facilities back to an acceptable operation level.