



CITY of CALABASAS

TRAFFIC AND TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION AGENDA REPORT

DATE: SEPTEMBER 17, 2020

TO: TRAFFIC AND TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

FROM: ROBERT YALDA, PE, TE, PUBLIC WORKS DIRECTOR/CITY ENGINEER

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SUBJECT: NEW CEQA TRANSPORTATION IMPACT THRESHOLDS (SB 743)

MEETING

DATE: SEPTEMBER 22, 2020

SUMMARY RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends that the Traffic and Transportation Commission approve, and forward a recommendation to the City Council, new Transportation Impact Thresholds for California Environmental Quality Act Compliance related to Transportation Analysis as follows:

1. A significant transportation impact would occur for land use projects under one of the following conditions:
 - a. For residential land use projects if the project generated home-based VMT exceeds 15% below the citywide baseline VMT per capita.
 - b. For commercial or industrial land use projects if the project generated home-based work VMT exceeds 15% below the citywide baseline average VMT per employee.
 - c. For regional retail land use projects if the project generates a net increase in total VMT in comparison to the citywide baseline VMT.
 - d. For land use plans if the plan generates a net increase in total VMT in comparison to the citywide baseline average VMT per service population.

2. For mixed use projects each land use component will be evaluated separately using the criteria above.
3. For other types of land use projects City staff will determine the appropriate VMT metric depending on the project characteristics. A significant impact would occur if the project exceeds 15% below citywide baseline VMT or if the project results in a net increase in Total VMT
4. A significant transportation impact would occur for transportation projects if the project results in a net increase in total VMT in the City compared to baseline conditions.

BACKGROUND:

The City, in compliance with State law, is required to establish specific transportation impact thresholds for California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) review for projects within the City. The laws and rules governing the CEQA process are contained in the CEQA Statute (Public Resources Code Section 21000), the State CEQA Guidelines (California Code of Regulations, Title 14, Section 15000), relevant published court decisions interpreting CEQA, and locally adopted CEQA guidelines or procedures.

The State adopted Senate Bill (SB) 743 in 2013 and codified it in Public Resource Code Section 21099 in 2018. The new law requires a change in how transportation impacts are measured under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). The new law no longer allows agencies to use vehicle Level of Service (LOS) and regulations are now requiring the use of Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT). Historically, delay and congestion were the metrics used when evaluating transportation impacts. To implement the legislation, lead agencies are required to determine appropriate VMT thresholds.

The passage of SB 743 included the following two legislative intent statements, which were considered when developing the recommended thresholds:

1. Ensure that the environmental impacts of traffic, such as noise, air pollution, and safety concerns, continue to be properly addressed and mitigated through the California Environmental Quality Act.
2. More appropriately balance the needs of congestion management with statewide goals related to infill development, promotion of public health through active transportation, and reduction of greenhouse gas emissions.

SB 743 is codified in Section 21099 of the Public Resource Code (PRC). The language in the PRC can be summarized by the following:

- The State shall prepare proposed revisions for determining the significance of transportation impacts of projects within transit priority areas.
- Those criteria shall promote the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, the development of multimodal transportation networks, and a diversity of land uses.
- In developing the criteria, OPR shall recommend potential metrics to measure transportation impacts that may include, but are not limited to, vehicle miles traveled, vehicle miles traveled per capita, automobile trip generation rates, or automobile trips generated.
- Automobile delay, as described solely by level of service or similar measures of vehicular capacity or traffic congestion, shall not be considered a significant impact on the environment.
- The changes in impact criteria does not relieve a public agency of the requirement to analyze a project's potentially significant transportation impacts related to air quality, noise, safety, or any other impact associated with transportation.
- The adequacy of parking for a project shall not support a finding of significance pursuant to this section.
- The changes do not preclude the application of local general plan policies, zoning codes, conditions of approval, thresholds, or any other planning requirements pursuant to the police power or any other authority.

The California Code of Regulations (COR) is the official policies of the State as approved by the applicable agency. In this case CEQA regulations fall under the Natural Resources Agency, which has adopted specific considerations for evaluating a project's transportation impacts in Section 15064.3. This section can be summarized as follows:

- Generally, VMT is the most appropriate measure of transportation impacts.
- Land use projects that create VMT exceeding an applicable threshold of significance may indicate a significant transportation impact except:
 - Projects within one-half mile of an existing major transit stop or stop along an existing high-quality transit corridor should be presumed to cause a less than significant impact.
 - Projects that decrease VMT in the project area should be presumed to cause a less than significant impact.
- Transportation Projects that reduce, or have no impact on, VMT should be presumed to cause a less than significant transportation impact.

- The lead agency has the discretion to choose the most appropriate methodology to evaluate a project's VMT.
- Requirements shall apply beginning on July 1, 2020.

Since VMT is a new methodology to analyze transportation impacts, there has been a need to develop appropriate guidance for projects subject to environmental review. As required by the PRC, a technical advisory was issued in 2018 by the California Office of Planning and Research (OPR) to assist agencies with compliance and recommending thresholds for agencies to consider. This technical advisory has recommendations for methodologies and thresholds, but they are not required to be followed by local agencies.

In order to be in compliance to meet the new SB 743 VMT requirements the City hired Fehr & Peers; a transportation consultant that has significant experience in this area. Their work effort has two phases:

- Phase 1 – Define VMT Screening Criteria and Update Traffic Impact Study Guidelines
- Phase 2 – Update the City's Transportation Impact Fee Program and Update the Circulation Element of the General Plan

They are currently working on Phase 1. On July 28, 2020 City staff and Fehr & Peers presented background information on SB 743 and a summary of their analysis of the local and regional VMT travel conditions. Since that time, they have prepared a formal report, which is attached to this staff report.

DISCUSSION/ANALYSIS:

Projects that are submitted to the City and require CEQA review and approval will first go through a screening process and then, if they do not get screened out, would have to be further evaluated for their VMT impacts. The process for screening review is described below.

Screening Criteria

The new regulation allows lead agencies to choose to use an impact screening method to streamline land use project review for CEQA transportation impacts. If a project does not pass an initial screening test, then a full impact analysis is warranted. In all, the process will include the following steps:

Step 1: Check Project Type for Screening

Certain project types may be presumed to have a less than significant impact. For instance, maintenance of existing facilities, installation of safety devices, installation of bicycle or pedestrian facilities, reducing existing vehicle lanes, modifications to on-street parking, adding alternative fuel charging infrastructure, local serving retail projects (less than 50,000 square feet) generally improve the convenience of shopping close to home and has the effect of reducing vehicle travel. This could be applied to individual businesses in a community-based shopping center. Similarly, adding local neighborhood serving parks and schools can reduce vehicle travel from facilities located further away. The following types of uses could be presumed to have a less than significant impact as their uses are local serving in nature:

- Local-serving retail establishments (less than 50,000 sf each)
- Local-serving K-12 schools
- Local parks
- Day care centers
- Local-serving gas stations
- Local-serving banks
- Local-serving medical offices
- Local-serving community assembly uses (community organizations, places of worship, etc.)
- Local-serving restaurants
- Local-serving hotels (e.g. non-destination hotels)
- Student housing projects
- Local serving community colleges that are consistent with the assumptions in the Regional Transportation Plan and Sustainable Community Strategy
- Projects generating less than 110 daily vehicle trips. The City would estimate trip generation for a project that may fall in this area and compare it to the 110 daily trip limit criteria. This generally corresponds to the following “typical” development:
 - 11 single family housing units
 - 16 multi-family, condominiums, or townhouse housing units
 - 10,000 sq. ft. of office
 - 15,000 sq. ft. of light industrial
 - 63,000 sq. ft. of warehousing
 - 79,000 sq. ft. of high cube transload and short-term storage warehouse
- Other locally serving land uses as determined by the Community Development Director

Step 2: Check for Low VMT Area Screening

Residential and office projects located within a low VMT-generating area may be presumed to have a less than significant impact. In addition, other employment-related and mixed-use land use projects may be screened if the project can reasonably be expected to generate VMT per resident, per worker, or per service population that is similar to the existing land uses in the low VMT area.

Low VMT-generating areas are those that have VMT 15% lower than the baseline VMT. To develop these screening maps a travel forecasting model was used to measure VMT performance for individual traffic analysis zones (TAZs) based on land use type. TAZs are geographic polygons similar to census block groups used to represent areas of travel behavior. Home-based VMT per resident and home-based-work VMT per employee were estimated for each TAZ and a map was created for each. The maps are shown in the Fehr & Peers report as Figures 5 and 6.

To identify if the project is in a low VMT-generating area, the City would review the map that corresponds to the land use type. If the project was within the low VMT-generated area it would be screened out. The City would need to identify that the project is consistent with the existing land uses within that TAZ and use professional judgement that there is nothing unique about the project that would otherwise be misrepresented utilizing the data from the travel demand model.

Step 3: Check for Transit Priority Area (TPA) Screening

Projects located within a TPA may be presumed to have a less than significant impact. Transit priority areas are defined as ½ mile from an existing High-Quality Transit Corridor (15 min headway or better during peak periods) stop or ½ mile around an existing major transit stop such as a Metrolink station or regional bus service stop. The current transit service map is shown in the attached Fehr & Peers report as Figure 7. Unfortunately, the City does not currently have transit services that would qualify as high-quality transit.

Land Use Project Thresholds

Projects not screened through the steps above would then complete a VMT analysis and forecasting to determine the projected VMT from the development project. The VMT would then be compared to the City's adopted thresholds to determine if there is a significant impact or less than significant impact for CEQA compliance.

OPR, in their guidance, recommends that agencies adopt a threshold of 15% reduction from the baseline VMT as the threshold for identifying a significant VMT CEQA impact. This threshold is based on VMT reductions needed to reach statewide climate goals. The County of Los Angeles has updated their Transportation Study

Guidelines to include a slightly higher threshold of 16.8% based on the California Air Resources Board research to reach an 80% reduction of green house gas emissions by 2050. This is slightly higher than what is recommended by OPR because the research is based on meeting slightly different goals.

Staff is recommending use of the 15% threshold rather than adopting the Los Angeles County threshold. In discussions between Public Works and Community Development staff determined that the 15% state recommendation provides more flexibility and will put the City in a position to be aligned with most agencies in the region and State.

Mitigation

If a project has a significant impact Transportation Demand Management (TDM) strategies would need to be built into the project to reduce the VMT below the threshold. The following key strategies were identified as the most appropriate.

- diversifying land use
- improving pedestrian networks
- implementing neighborhood traffic management infrastructure
- building bicycle network improvements
- installing workplace bike storage, locker, and shower facilities
- encouraging telecommuting and alternative work schedules
- providing commute-based ride-share programs such as carpooling and vanpooling
- providing local micro transit options such as shared bikes or scooters for short local trips
- subsidizing non-vehicle commute trips

Mitigation Monitoring

Developments that needed to have mitigation measures would look at the available options for reducing their VMT impacts and the measures would be built into the development and the developer would be responsible for ensuring these measures remain in place. The City will have to develop a VMT mitigation monitoring program to periodically review the mitigation measures and determine if they are being met or not. This would be additional work effort by City staff on an annual or bi-annual basis depending on the monitoring requirements set forth in the conditions of approval. Monitoring may consist of the following items:

- Confirming physical on-site requirements
- Confirming physical off-site requirements
- Reviewing program materials and participation

- Counting number of vehicle trips
- Reviewing subsidy payments

Typically, this would be a self-certification submittal to the City and City staff would confirm

Transportation Project Thresholds

CEQA review is also required for transportation projects. These projects have the potential to change travel behavior and travel patterns. These projects are required to quantify the amount of additional vehicle travel and assess air quality, greenhouse gas, energy, and noise impacts in order to determine the project impacts. As stated in the California Code of Regulations Section 15064.3, any transportation project that reduces or has no impact on VMT on the regional network are presumed to have less than significant impact. Types of projects that would fall under this category as stated in the OPR Technical Advisory are:

- Roadway rehabilitation, maintenance, or replacement
- Rehabilitation of existing transportation assets
- Roadway safety projects
- New traffic signals or traffic signal upgrades and improvements
- Addition, removal, or reconfiguration of traffic lanes that are not for through traffic
- Additional roadway capacity on local or collector streets provided that the project also substantially improves conditions for pedestrians, bicyclists, and, if applicable, transit.
- Reduction in the number of through lanes
- Timing of traffic signals to optimize vehicle, bicycle, or pedestrian flow
- Installation of roundabouts or traffic circles
- New transit services
- Addition or modification of on-street parking or loading restrictions
- New or enhanced bicycle or pedestrian facilities within the existing right-of-way
- Installation of publicly available alternative fuel/charging infrastructure

Transportation projects that are presumed to increase VMT on the regional network and therefore may have a significant impact are:

- Roadway capacity enhancing projects such as the addition of through lanes on an existing roadway

- New roadways

For these types of projects, the City will be required to assess the amount of vehicle travel the project will add and compare that to the significance threshold.

FISCAL IMPACT/SOURCE OF FUNDING:

There is no direct fiscal impact to the City for the adoption of new transportation impact thresholds. However, the new thresholds may impact City staff time. Projects that have to implement mitigation measures that reduce their VMT impact will need to be monitored. The monitoring requirements could be a combination of one-time or ongoing staff time depending on the mitigation measures and the monitoring requirements.

REQUESTED ACTION:

Staff recommends that the Traffic and Transportation Commission approve, and forward a recommendation to the City Council, new Transportation Impact Thresholds for California Environmental Quality Act Compliance related to Transportation Analysis as detailed above.

ATTACHMENTS: Transportation Analysis Updates in Calabasas
Prepared by Fehr & Peers