



Agenda Report

19-1054

Agenda Date: 12/11/2019

REPORT Planning Commission

SUBJECT

STUDY SESSION: Overview and Update on Proposed Changes to the City's Transportation Analysis Methodology and Processes to Comply with State Law

BACKGROUND

Staff will conduct a study session with the Planning Commission to provide an overview and update on proposed changes to the City's transportation analysis methodology and process for new development projects required to implement changes in State law.

In September 2013, the State of California Legislature passed, and Governor Brown signed, Senate Bill 743 - Steinberg (Attachment 1). SB 743 changes the way transportation impacts should be analyzed under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) by removing automobile Level of Service (LOS) from environmental transportation analysis and replacing it with the State recommended Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT) methodology or other measures that "promote the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, the development of multimodal transportation networks, and a diversity of land uses." While LOS measures traffic delay at signalized intersections or roadway segments, VMT generally measures the distance a vehicle will travel to a destination.

In December 2018, the State of California Natural Resources Agency certified and adopted an updated CEQA Guidelines package, including the Guidelines section implementing Senate Bill 743 (Section 15064.3). Additionally, the Governor's Office of Planning and Research has published a technical guidance document titled, "Technical Advisory on Evaluating Transportation Impacts in CEQA", which contains technical recommendations on how CEQA lead agencies should assess VMT, create and evaluate thresholds of significance related to VMT impacts, and require and monitor impact mitigation measures. All California lead agencies, which includes cities, counties, etc., are required to implement VMT as the methodology for conducting CEQA analysis for projects by July 2020. The Valley Transportation Authority is working with all Santa Clara County member agencies to provide technical support and promote consistencies between cities in transitioning from LOS to VMT in environmental documents.

DISCUSSION

The City of Santa Clara currently relies on LOS to complete CEQA analysis as the City's standard for the evaluation of potential environmental effects for proposed projects upon transportation resources. The State mandates that automobile delay, as measured by LOS and other similar metrics, should generally no longer be used as the standard to identify a significant environmental effect for the evaluation of potential environmental impacts required to complete a CEQA analysis. To comply with State law, the City of Santa Clara is required to adopt and implement a new standard by July 2020 for analyzing transportation impacts. The State recommends VMT as the most appropriate measure for determining transportation impacts under CEQA.

City staff is currently analyzing the effects of adopting a new methodology on land development and transportation projects, as well as evaluating the consistency of such a methodology with the City's General Plan.

On November 5, 2019, the City Council held a similar study session on the proposed changes to the City's transportation analysis methodology and staff will share with the Planning Commission, the direction and feedback that the City Council provided.

At the Study Session on December 11, 2019, staff will provide the following:

- a presentation on the concepts of LOS and VMT
- background information about how the City currently analyzes transportation impacts
- the areas of interest that staff will analyze in relation to this proposed change in transportation analysis methodology
- the status of other local agencies efforts towards adopting VMT
- the proposed workplan and schedule for the City to comply with the July 2020 State deadline.
- a summary of the City Council feedback from the November 5, 2019 City Council meeting.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

The action being considered is exempt from formal review under the California Environmental Quality Act ("CEQA") pursuant to Public Resources Code Section 21080(b)(1) and CEQA Guidelines Section 15268(a), which provide 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.

FISCAL IMPACT

There is no additional cost to the City other than staff time and expense.

COORDINATION

This report has been coordinated with the City Attorney's Office and the Department of Public Works.

PUBLIC CONTACT

Public contact was made by posting the Council agenda on the City's official-notice bulletin board outside City Hall Council Chambers. A complete agenda packet is available on the City's website and in the City Clerk's Office at least 72 hours prior to a Regular Meeting and 24 hours prior to a Special Meeting. A hard copy of any agenda report may be requested by contacting the City Clerk's Office at (408) 615-2220, email clerk@santaclaraca.gov or at the public information desk at any City of Santa Clara public library.

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ATTACHMENTS

1. Senate Bill 743 - VMT Statute