



DATE: March 2, 2020

TO: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council through City Manager

FROM: Olivia Ervin, Principal Environmental Planner
Heather Hines, Planning Manager

SUBJECT: City Council Appointment to the Technical Advisory Committee for the City's Development of Thresholds to Transition to Vehicle Miles Traveled Consistent with Senate Bill 743

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the City Council appoint one council member to the Technical Advisory Committee for the City's transition from a Level of Service (LOS) metric to a Vehicle Miles Travel (VMT) metric, consistent with SB 743.

BACKGROUND

Historically, the City of Petaluma has used level of service (LOS) methodology to assess traffic operations and analyze environmental impacts for projects in accordance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). In 2013, Senate Bill 743 established new legislation mandating a major change to the CEQA guidelines (Section 15064.3); replacing the LOS metric with a vehicle miles traveled (VMT) metric. The shift from LOS to VMT focuses on regional traffic patterns and reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, rather than vehicle delays on local roadway networks.

In July of 2018 traffic consulting firm Fehr & Peers presented at a joint meeting of the City Council and Planning Commission to explain the changing landscape under SB 743 and including the required deadline for adoption of local VMT thresholds by July 2020. In December of 2018 the City entered into a contract with Fehr & Peers to guide the City through the transition from LOS to VMT. As part of that effort, Fehr & Peers has been working closely with Sonoma County Transit Agency (SCTA) to develop a Sonoma County model framework informed by regional data. In late Fall of 2019, the model was calibrated by SCTA, and Fehr & Peers began developing parameters for a VMT model (travel demand model) specific to Petaluma. That effort is well underway and draft VMT baseline information, metrics, methodology, screening levels, thresholds and mitigation measures are being developed. The executed contract with Fehr & Peers includes Tasks 2.3 and 3.3 to present baseline VMT data, model calibration considerations, accounting methodology, and VMT thresholds to a Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) for their review and comment prior to presenting final VMT information to the Planning Commission and City Council.

DISCUSSION

At this time staff is forming the TAC in anticipation of completion of the baseline data, accounting methodology, and VMT thresholds. As outlined in the executed scope of work with Fehr & Peers, the TAC is intended to include representatives from the following entities:

- One (1) liaison from each:
 - City Council
 - Planning Commission
 - Petaluma Pedestrian and Bicycle Advisory Committee
 - Petaluma Transit Advisory Committee
- City of Petaluma staff
- Sonoma County Transportation Agency (SCTA) staff
- Caltrans staff
- Sonoma County Staff

Subsequent to the execution of the contract, the City established the Climate Action Commission and staff believes a liaison from that commission would be a valuable addition to the TAC.

The role of the TAC is to review draft VMT information and provide input and feedback to the consultant. The TAC is expected to meet twice during the spring of 2020 (with meetings targeted for March and May). At the first meeting the TAC will be provided with an overview of the VMT model and preliminary recommendations on VMT metrics and methodology. At the second meeting the TAC will consider the Administrative Draft VMT Report containing draft VMT baseline information, metrics, methodology, screening levels, thresholds, and mitigation measures and will be tasked with providing input and feedback.

Input received from the TAC will be integrated into a Final VMT Report, which will then be presented to decision making bodies including at least one public hearing before the Planning Commission and at least one public hearing before the City Council.

Following the City Council's appointment to the TAC, staff will be attending meetings of the other committees and commissions for their appointments as well as reaching out to other organizations for their recommendations for representatives to sit on the TAC. Internal city staff anticipated to play a role in the TAC include the City Engineer, the Transit Manager, and the Traffic Engineer.

PUBLIC OUTREACH

In July of 2018, at a joint meeting of the City Council and Planning Commission Fehr & Peers presented SB 743 and the requirement for adoption of local VMT thresholds by July 2020. The City's LOS to VMT transition will be considered at future public meetings to solicit input on appropriate VMT metric, screening levels and thresholds specific to Petaluma. Public outreach includes one or more public meetings before the TAC, Pedestrian and Bike Advisory Committee, Transit Advisory Committee, Planning Commission, and City Council.

COUNCIL GOAL ALIGNMENT

The City Council has identified “Our Environmental Legacy” as one of its key strategic initiatives for 2019-2021. Objective #1 seeks to “preserve and protect Petaluma’s environment with smart and efficient use of resources;” and includes workplan item 42, which directs the City to “Find ways for City operations to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, conserve water, decrease waste, and minimize use of fossil fuels and investigate and pursue options for carbon sequestration.” Transitioning to a VMT metric promotes a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by minimizing VMT and use of fossil fuels.

CLIMATE ACTION

In 2019 the City Council adopted a climate crisis resolution (2019-055) acknowledging issues of climate change and placing sustainable practices as a primary City goal. Transitioning to a VMT metric as directed by SB 743 aligns with the City’s climate action goals. Managing the transportation system to minimize VMTs, contributes directly and indirectly to reducing greenhouse gas emissions. The legislative intent of SB 743 is to “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.”

FINANCIAL IMPACTS

The executed contract with Fehr & Peers for the VMT Transition is for \$135,500. The formation and appointment of the TAC is within the approved scope of work and does not in and of itself have an additional financial impact.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1: City Council Resolution No. 2018-183

Attachment 2: VMT Fact Sheet