

REPORT TO GENERAL PLAN 2040 STEERING COMMITTEE

Subject: Transportation Metrics

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This agenda item addresses the methods used by the City of San Rafael to measure the traffic impacts of new development. It includes a link to a staff report presented to the San Rafael City Council at its December 2, 2019 meeting. The City Council provided preliminary direction in response to the policy questions identified in this report. The Steering Committee will be briefed on this discussion at its January 8 meeting. A follow-up City Council meeting will take place in March 2020 requesting additional direction, once the City has completed traffic modeling for General Plan 2040.

REPORT

Background

Like many communities in California, San Rafael has used “Level of Service” (LOS) to monitor traffic impacts at intersections for the past 35 years. LOS uses a letter grade (from “A” to “F”) to define the acceptable level of delay at intersections during the AM and PM peak hours. When an intersection falls below the standard, physical improvements such as turning lanes or signal adjustments may be programmed to restore traffic conditions. While this approach is generally easy to understand, increasing road capacity to accommodate more cars may induce demand and result in additional vehicles and vehicle emissions. Increasing emissions runs counter to the greenhouse gas (GHG) reduction goals mandated by California Assembly Bill 32 (AB 32) and the City’s Climate Change Action Plan 2030.

In 2013, the Governor signed SB 743, which mandates major changes in how transportation impacts are analyzed under CEQA. SB 743 requires a shift to traffic analysis methodology from LOS and local street operations to “vehicle miles traveled” (VMT). The intent is to analyze and reduce the amount of driving and the length of vehicle trips associated with new development, rather than reducing vehicle delays on the local street network. With the use of VMT, the longer the vehicle travel from origin to destination, the greater the impact.

Effective July 2020, cities and counties in California may no longer use LOS to evaluate transportation impacts in CEQA documents and must instead shift to VMT. LOS can continue to be used by cities/counties to manage and monitor the local roadway network, but it cannot be linked to or required for CEQA/ environmental review.

Switching from LOS to VMT is intended to:

- Streamline CEQA review for projects that improve infrastructure and safety for pedestrians, bicyclists, and transit-riders while reducing the need to travel exclusively by automobile.
- Facilitate residential, commercial, and mixed-use infill projects close to transit that minimize impacts to air quality and reduce greenhouse gases by reducing the number of miles driven by automobiles.
- Focus CEQA transportation mitigation on pedestrian, bicycle, and transit facilities, as well as transportation demand management (carpooling, flextime, etc.).

The emerging General Plan 2040 also strives to reduce GHG emissions and increase transportation options for San Rafael residents and workers. The Plan will provide the capacity for the City to create new housing and workplaces near transit, particularly in Downtown San Rafael. It will also incorporate key provisions of the Climate Change Action Plan 2030, as well as regional initiatives to bring residents and jobs closer together. Growth strategies should reduce the need to travel long distances by car (for work, services, etc.), support transit ridership, and reduce environmental and fiscal impacts.

Council Report

A link to the City Council report on this topic is provided [here](#). Pages 5-12 of the report address the transportation policies (the remainder of the report is a status update on the General Plan Update and may also be of interest).

The Steering Committee will be briefed on the Council discussion at the January 8 meeting.