



Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT) Fact Sheet

What is VMT?

Vehicle Miles Traveled measures the distance a motorized vehicle will travel to a destination, divided by the number of passengers. Typically, development with poor transit access that is located far from job centers or shopping areas, generates more driving than development situated close to complementary uses and transit. Cities use VMT to evaluate greenhouse gas emissions and some transportation impacts.

Why is the Town revisiting its transportation impact policies?

In 2013, Governor Brown signed SB 743, requiring amendments to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines with respect to transportation-related impacts. SB 743 specified that automobile delay will no longer be considered a significant impact on the environment. The intent of this legislation was to balance the needs of congestion management more appropriately with statewide goals related to infill development, promoting public health through active transportation, and reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

Additionally, on September 4, 2019, the Town Council adopted Climate Emergency Resolution No. 3548-19, which prioritized enacting policies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and directed staff to integrate climate change considerations into all policies.

The California Governor's Office of Planning and Research (OPR) determined that transportation impacts should be based on Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT), instead of Level of Service (LOS), or the amount of delay experienced at intersections. As of July 1, 2020, when SB 743 went into effect, CEQA requires traffic analyses to focus on the environmental effects of *driving*, instead of impacts to the experience of *drivers*.

Is Windsor required to adopt a VMT policy?

SB 743 is in effect and all projects subject to CEQA must include VMT analysis. In the absence of a Town-specific VMT policy, OPR's Technical Advisory would be the guiding policy document. By adopting its own policy, the Town can use guidelines that are more tailored to the local and regional context than the State's guidelines, with an emphasis on supporting the Town's housing goals to the extent feasible.

Does the Town still consider LOS in its decision making?

Yes. Even though Level of Service is no longer used for considering impacts under CEQA, the Town still reviews a project’s impacts to LOS when considering its operating characteristics and consistency with the General Plan.

How does Windsor’s draft VMT policy differ from the State’s guidelines?

Local jurisdictions may adopt screening criteria and thresholds of significance that differ from OPR’s Guidelines, provided that they are supported by substantial evidence to achieve the intent of SB 743 in reducing VMT and reducing greenhouse gas emissions. For instance, the draft VMT policy includes the evidence-backed small-project screening option that “screens out,” or exempts from further VMT analysis, housing projects that include 23 or fewer units. State guidelines only allow screening of projects with 11 units or less.

What types of development are eligible for screening in the Town’s draft policy?

The flow chart below illustrates the screening process under the draft VMT policy.

