



Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT) CEQA Guidelines per SB 743

City of Oceanside

Senate Bill 743 Implementation: Analyzing Transportation Impacts Based On Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT) under CEQA

CITY OF OCEANSIDE TRAFFIC IMPACT ANALYSIS GUIDELINES FOR VMT AND LOS ASSESSMENT

Recognizing the inconsistency between adopted City guidelines and State legislation, the City of Oceanside has prepared the [Traffic Impact Analysis Guidelines for VMT and LOS Assessment](#) as a guide for applicants and their consultants when analyzing potential transportation impacts for their projects. These guidelines set local significance thresholds, metrics, screening criteria and analysis methodology for evaluating transportation impacts for projects within the City of Oceanside.

If you have any comments or questions, please contact Teala Cotter, Associate Traffic Engineer at tcotter@oceansideca.org (mailto:tcotter@oceansideca.org) or (760) 435-3538.

BACKGROUND

In 2013, Governor Brown signed SB 743 into law to better align with State policies that promote public health, infill development, multimodal transportation networks (pedestrian, bicycle, and transit), and the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. The purpose of SB 743 is to more effectively analyze and disclose a proposed project's transportation-related impacts on the environment as part of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) review process before a decision on a project is made. As amended in December 2018, State CEQA Guidelines Section 15064.3 (Determining the Significance of Transportation Impacts) now specifies that "vehicle miles traveled" (VMT) shall be the most appropriate measure of transportation impacts. VMT refers to the amount and distance of automobile travel attributable to a project. A project's effect on automobile delay and roadway congestion, previously measured by "level of service" (LOS), will no longer constitute an environmental impact. Instead, CEQA review of a discretionary project must focus on the environmental impacts of traffic (including noise, air pollution, and safety concerns) by considering how far vehicles will travel in a defined geographic area compared to the average for that project type. SB743 went into effect on July 1, 2020.

Under CEQA, the lead agency (i.e., the City) may set their own significance thresholds, metrics, screening criteria, and analysis methodology. To facilitate implementation of SB 743, the Governor's Office of Planning and Research (OPR) developed a [Technical Advisory on Evaluating Transportation Impacts in CEQA](#). The Institute of Transportation Engineers (ITE) San Diego Section also updated their [Guidelines for Transportation Impacts Studies in the San Diego Region \(May 2019\)](#) to incorporate SB 743).

OPR's Technical Advisory recommends that a per capita or per employee VMT that is 15% below that of existing development be considered a reasonable threshold of significance. OPR finds that "...achieving 15% lower per capita (residential) or per employee (office) VMT than existing development is both generally achievable and is supported by evidence that connects this level of reduction to the State's emissions goals."

Although LOS can no longer be used to determine significant impacts under CEQA, the ITE San Diego Section guidelines state that transportation engineers and planners still find automobile delay and LOS to be of interest when planning, designing, operating and maintaining the roadway system. Localized traffic congestion remains a concern to the traveling public. The analysis of LOS and roadway congestion is also still included in the General Plan for many jurisdictions, including Oceanside. Thus, LOS analysis may still be included as part of a project's review for policy consistency through provided transportation studies or assessments outside of, and in addition to, CEQA review.