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Department of Transportation recommending the Board:
1) Receive the workshop information on implementation of Senate Bill 743 for transportation projects; and
2) Approve and authorize the Chair to sign Resolution **088-2021**, the El Dorado County Vehicle Miles Traveled Threshold of Significance for Evaluation of Transportation Project Impacts Under the California Environmental Quality Act, that provides direction on the County's application of the methodology, significance thresholds, mitigation measures, and screening criteria for implementation of Senate Bill 743 for transportation projects.

FUNDING: Road Fund.

DISCUSSION / BACKGROUND

History of SB 743 and Prior Board Action

On September 27, 2013, the Governor signed into law Senate Bill 743 (SB 743). SB 743 was originally enacted to address transportation issues related to the development of the Golden One Center in downtown Sacramento. The legislative intent of SB 743 was to 1) ensure that the environmental impacts of traffic, such as noise, air pollution, and safety concerns, continue to be properly addressed and mitigated through the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA); and, 2) 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.

In January 2019, the Natural Resources Agency finalized updates to the CEQA Guidelines including the incorporation of SB 743 modifications. The guidelines' changes were approved by the Office of Administrative Law and are now in effect. SB 743 became the required method to review transportation impacts under CEQA beginning on July 1, 2020.

SB 743 changes how transportation impacts are measured under CEQA, from using vehicle level of service (LOS) to using vehicle miles traveled (VMT). Traditionally, transportation impacts have been evaluated by examining whether the project is likely to cause automobile delay at intersections and congestion on nearby individual highway segments, and whether this delay will exceed a certain amount (this is known as Level of Service or LOS analysis). The State Office of Planning and Research (OPR) has determined that the appropriate metric for the change is VMT. VMT measures how much actual auto travel (additional miles driven) a proposed project would create on roads. If the project adds excessive car travel onto roads, the project may cause a significant transportation impact. This change is intended to capture the impacts of driving on the environment compared to the impact to drivers. LOS or other delay metrics may still be used to evaluate the impact of projects on drivers as part of the County's land use entitlement reviews and impact fee programs. However, LOS will no longer be allowed to be used as the metric for evaluating transportation impacts under CEQA. To implement SB 743, lead agencies will need to determine appropriate VMT methodologies, thresholds, and feasible mitigation measures.

At the behest of County and City staff, the El Dorado County Transportation Commission (EDCTC) secured funding to assist the member agencies with implementation of SB 743. EDCTC contracted with the firm Fehr & Peers to prepare the *El Dorado County and City of Placerville SB 743 Implementation Plan* (Implementation Plan) (See June 20, 2020, Item 36, Legistar 20-0606, Attachment C or Transportation's website at https://www.edcgov.us/Government/dot/Pages/Vehicle-Miles-Traveled-and-SB-743.aspx). The purpose of this project was to help EDCTC partner agencies understand the specific questions that need to be addressed when making these determinations and to provide research, analysis, and other evidence to support their final SB 743 implementation decisions. EDCTC had facilitated Fehr & Peers working in direct partnership with El Dorado County and the City of Placerville transportation staff and traffic engineers to review the existing General Plan policies, travel demand model metrics, and other technical elements.

On October 6, 2020, the Board of Supervisors adopted Resolution 141-2020, El Dorado County Vehicle Miles Traveled Thresholds of Significance for Purposes of Analyzing Transportation Impacts Under the California Environmental Quality Act, for land-use projects, following a public review process consisting of study sessions with the Board on June 30, 2020, August 4, 2020, and September 22, 2020; and a meeting with local representatives of the North State Building Industry Association on June 24, 2020. The adoption of the thresholds for land use projects was based on the OPR Technical Advisory (Attachment D) and the Implementation Plan as is the proposed threshold for transportation projects.

Today's Board Action to Adopt a Threshold for Transportation Projects

The purpose of today's item is to present to the Board workshop information on implementation of SB 743 for transportation projects, and to propose to the Board the adoption of a resolution to set a threshold of significance for transportation impacts of transportation projects under CEQA. Transportation projects include, but are not limited to, Capital Improvement Program (CIP) projects such as road widening projects, traffic signal installation, and safety improvements.

Metrics

VMT can be calculated using two different types of metrics: absolute metrics and efficiency metrics. An absolute metric measures a specific amount of VMT, such as total VMT on the roadway network in El Dorado County. An efficiency metric expresses VMT as a ratio or rate, such as VMT per capita. Air quality and greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions analysis for CEQA use total VMT as an input. The OPR Technical Advisory on SB 743 recommends use of absolute VMT when considering the effects of transportation projects on vehicle travel. A lead agency that uses the VMT metric to assess the transportation impacts of a transportation project may simply report that change in VMT as the impact. Staff recommends that the Board adopt the absolute VMT metric, consistent with the OPR Technical Advisory.

Measure of Effects

Project types that would likely lead to a measurable and substantial increase in vehicle travel generally include the addition of through lanes on existing or new highways, including general-purpose lanes, high occupancy vehicle (HOV) lanes, peak period lanes, auxiliary lanes, or lanes through grade-separated interchanges.

While CEQA does not require perfection, it is important to make a reasonably accurate estimate of transportation projects' effects on vehicle travel in order to make reasonably accurate estimates of GHG emissions, air quality emissions, energy impacts, and noise impacts.

Induced travel occurs where roadway capacity is expanded in an area of present or projected future congestion. The effect typically manifests over several years. If the Board would like additional information on how lower travel times make the modified facility more attractive to travelers, please see page 3 of the staff memo (Attachment B).

Transportation Projects Methodology and Screening Criteria

Methodology refers to the tools available to calculate the chosen metric. The methodology can range from a qualitative discussion to a detailed analysis that utilizes a travel demand model. Any tool will need to be based on the same travel demand model or other data used to establish thresholds, in order to provide an "apples to apples" comparison between the project's effect and the threshold baseline condition.

The Technical Advisory is clear that transportation projects require a different analysis than land-use projects. The flow chart for a transportation project was developed by Fehr & Peers, was presented in the proposed implementation plan, and is included as Attachment E.

In general, transit and active transportation projects may be presumed to have a less-than-significant VMT impact. The OPR Technical Advisory presents a list of projects that are not considered to be VMT-inducing (beginning on Page 20), and result in a less-than-significant impact. The types of projects included in the OPR Technical Advisory are replicated in Attachment B and the proposed resolution.

For road capacity expansion projects, a complete VMT impact analysis is likely required. This analysis will start with the use of the El Dorado County Travel Demand Model to provide the analysis for transportation projects. Any increase in VMT by the project under baseline conditions or cumulative conditions would be considered a transportation impact under CEQA. Staff also recommends the County use the VMT analysis process flow chart, as attached, for transportation projects.

As with the significance thresholds and methodology already approved by the Board for land-use projects, staff is recommending the use of the El Dorado County Travel Demand Model and the El Dorado General Plan Countywide VMT calculated from the model as the thresholds against which to compare "baseline plus project" and "cumulative plus project" conditions.

VMT generation is highly dependent on the location of a project with respect to the availability of alternative transportation modes and its location with respect to origins and destinations of trips within the regional area. Average vehicle trip length, which is an important component of VMT, is highly influenced by these factors. Transportation models are developed to take these factors into account and are widely accepted for analysis of factors related to trip-making behavior.

If a project would likely lead to a measurable and substantial increase in vehicle travel, the lead agency should conduct an analysis assessing the amount of vehicle travel the project will induce.

Department of Transportation (Transportation) staff recommends the Board adopt the proposed resolution which incorporates the following pertaining to transportation projects:

Methodology: 1) use the absolute VMT metric for the transportation analysis for transportation

projects; 2) generally use the updated El Dorado County Travel Demand Model for VMT analysis; and 3) use the VMT analysis process flow chart for transportation projects.

Thresholds: set no “net increase in VMT” as the threshold consistent with the Countywide absolute VMT for transportation projects.

Mitigations: use the mitigation measures outlined in the staff report, as applicable, and potentially incorporate new mitigation measures as they become appropriate for use in El Dorado County.

Presumption of less-than-significant impacts: rely on OPR Technical Advisory as substantial evidence for certain project types that are presumed to have a CEQA less-than-significant impact and therefore generally should not require an induced travel analysis.

Transportation will incorporate the requirements of the adopted resolution, including any necessary rule changes, into the Transportation Impact Study Guidelines after adoption of the resolution. Transportation may modify the Transportation Impact Study Guidelines as necessary to reflect the latest research, data, and substantial evidence appropriate to facilitate implementation of the SB 743 requirements. However, any major policy or procedural changes that affect the basic thresholds or methodology approved by the Board will be brought to the Board of Supervisors for review and approval prior to incorporation into the Transportation Impact Study Guidelines.

ALTERNATIVES
The Board could choose not to authorize the Chair to sign the resolution adopting the significance thresholds and direct staff to make edits to the resolution and return for approval.

PRIOR BOARD ACTION
On October 6, 2020 (Item 16, Legistar 20-1059 v2), the Board adopted Resolution 141-2020, the El Dorado County Vehicle Miles Traveled Thresholds of Significance for Purposes of Analyzing Transportation Impacts Under the California Environmental Quality Act, for land use projects.

OTHER DEPARTMENT / AGENCY INVOLVEMENT
Planning and Building Department
County Counsel

CAO RECOMMENDATION / COMMENTS
Receive and file the presentation and approve as recommended.

FINANCIAL IMPACT
There is no change to Net County Cost associated with this agenda item.

CLERK OF THE BOARD FOLLOW UP ACTIONS
N/A

STRATEGIC PLAN COMPONENT
Infrastructure, Public Safety

CONTACT
Rafael Martinez, Director

Department of Transportation