

STAFF REPORT

Date: July 15, 2020

To: TRPA Regional Plan Implementation Committee

From: TRPA Staff

Subject: Status Report on Vehicle Miles Traveled Threshold Update and Project Level Assessment Approach

Summary and Staff Recommendation:

The Vehicle Miles Traveled (“VMT”) threshold requires updating. Governing Board leadership has indicated a desire to complete this work by the end of Calendar 2020. This staff report sets out the recommended approach to derive the new standard based on California and Nevada greenhouse gas reduction goals and the Compact’s direction to reduce dependence on the private automobile. This item is for discussion and possible direction.

Background:

The Regional Plan Implementation Committee (RPIC) last discussed and provided direction on these items at the March and April 2020 meetings. This report provides the status of work on these items since then.

VMT Threshold Update:

At the March 25, 2020 RPIC meeting staff received direction to update the current VMT threshold to address greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, mobility, and other concerns related to vehicle travel (e.g., compact mixed use development in town centers to reduce reliance on the automobile) so that the updated standard(s) can be applied at both the regional and project levels.

Federal air quality regulations allow California the option to set automobile emission standards that are different from those set at the federal level. California has done so for low and zero emission vehicles, and a growing number of states have chosen to adopt those standards instead of the federal standards. In addition to the low and zero emission standards, metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) are subject to the California Air Resources Board (CARB) per capita GHG reduction targets for passenger vehicles as well as sustainable communities strategy (SCS) requirements intended to create more compact development and meet affordable housing needs.

In addition to joining the US Climate Alliance and passing legislation to raise the renewable energy portfolio standard in 2019, this year the State of Nevada is preparing a State Climate Strategy and started the rule making process with their State Environmental Commission to adopt the California standards for low and zero emission vehicles. This presents TRPA with unprecedented policy alignment between California and Nevada on vehicle emission standards and, as the designated MPO, clear policy direction to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and pursue more sustainable communities.

The Regional Transportation Plan/Sustainable Communities Strategy (RTP/SCS) update that will be considered by the TRPA Governing Board later this year will meet the CARB per capita GHG reduction

target for passenger vehicles and, along with TRPA Regional Plan, supports Sustainable Communities Strategy objectives. This policy alignment between the states, the significant efforts by TRPA to support and be consistent with those policies, the TRPA Bi-State Compact direction to reduce dependence on the automobile, and the direction from the TRPA Regional Plan Implementation Committee provide the context for the proposed updated VMT threshold.

The objective of this effort is to establish a vehicle miles traveled (VMT) threshold standard to reduce mobile source greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, reduce dependency on the private automobile, and create more sustainable communities. Key features of the new standard will include:

- Shifting away from the old nitrogen-based VMT standard that has been argued by some to be a de facto development cap rather than as intended as a limitation on nitrogen emissions.
- Promoting attainment of the GHG reduction goals of Nevada and California
- Implementing Compact guidance to reduce dependence on the private automobile

Related actions to achieve the new VMT reduction standard are and will be:

- Updating the Regional Plan and Regional Transportation Plan/Sustainable Communities Strategy (RTP/SCS) to achieve and maintain this threshold standard
- Creating project-level implementation tools so that development and redevelopment projects are designed to be consistent with and advance the Regional Plan, RTP/SCS, and VMT threshold
- Updating the Air Quality Mitigation (AQM) fee so individual projects offset transportation impacts; fee only used for mobility projects in RTP/SCS

To further develop the updated VMT threshold standard, staff seeks RPIC concurrence with the following parameters:

- The threshold standard will establish a per capita (resident & visitor) VMT reduction goal.
- The threshold will establish a target date for achieving the new standard’s VMT reductions consistent with and patterned after California and Nevada GHG policy objectives.
- The standard will be used to reduce GHG emissions and increase the use of alternative modes of transportation while not further limiting the level of development and redevelopment as set in the Regional Plan.

To update the standard a number of technical details will need to be addressed, including data sources, baseline VMT, and calculation of resident and visitor population. The schedule below outlines the process to address those issues in order to adopt a new standard before the end of this calendar year.

Task Description (Committee/Board)	August	September	October	November	December
1.) Review and recommendation of the baseline level of VMT for the threshold standard update, 2.) review of the CARB passenger vehicle per capita GHG reduction target for the Tahoe MPO and potential emissions based on implementing low and zero emission vehicle standards, and 3.) review of the OPR SB 743 new development VMT reduction guidance and potential level of VMT reduction from remaining development potential in Tahoe Region.					

1.) Review and recommendation of resident and visitor population, 2.) review and recommendation of percentage VMT reduction per capita, and 3.) review and recommendation of target year for Tahoe Region following review of per capita reduction goals,					
Determination of final VMT/capita threshold update package including recommendations for implementation of the updated threshold standard through the Regional Plan, RTP/SCS, Code, project level assessment, fees, other funding sources, monitoring and threshold evaluations, and related actions. (TTAC)					
Threshold update package with TTAC input for recommendation. (APC)					
Threshold update package with TTAC and APC input for recommendation. (RPIC)					
Threshold update package and TTAC, APC, and RPIC input for approval. (GB)					

APC – Advisory Planning Commission
 CARB – California Air Resources Board
 GB – Governing Board
 MPO – Metropolitan Planning Organization
 OPR – California Governor’s Office of Planning and Research
 RPIC – Regional Plan Implementation Committee
 TTAC – Transportation Technical Advisory Committee

Project Level Assessment:

At the April 22, 2020 meeting staff provided an update on the proposed approach to project level transportation impact assessment and updating the air quality mitigation fee. The proposed project level assessment will shift the focus from congestion to mobility. It will also shift the focus from trips to VMT. The framework is being developed in coordination with California local governments to ensure consistency with California SB 743.

Congestion is a measure that focuses on roadway capacity for automobiles. Mobility focuses on the entire transportation system, including automobiles, transit, trails, corridor improvements, transportation technology that improves operations, parking management and other approaches that improve the connection of people to places. In other words, it addresses mobility through the broader multi-modal transportation system.

Roadway capacity in Tahoe is limited and the Bi-State Compact calls for reducing dependency on automobiles. However, when viewed in its entirety, the Tahoe Region transportation system is not similarly limited. New trails and transit services, traffic signal improvements, adaptive corridor management with transit priority and/or reversible travel lanes, and parking management are possible, proposed, and/or being added to the system to improve connectivity and mobility. These multi-modal transportation system improvements are what the new VMT threshold, the RTP/SCS, corridor plans, the project analysis tool, and updated mitigation measures are aimed at promoting.

The Regional Transportation Plan and Sustainable Communities Strategies (RTP/SCS) will address congestion and improve mobility. The vision for the Tahoe regional transportation system is interconnected, inter-regional, and sustainable, connecting people and places in ways that reduce reliance on the private automobile. In the RTP/SCS, goals, policies, projects, programs, and funding are identified to improve mobility by using the existing roadway capacity more efficiently and enhancing the entire transportation system.

Corridor plans being developed for the SR 89 recreation corridor, US 50 east shore, and in the resort triangle which spans North Tahoe and Truckee, will include new transit service, traffic signal technology improvements, transit priority and possibly reversible vehicle travel lanes, and parking management.

Projects like the Tahoe East Shore Trail and those in the Main Street Management Plan have provided, or will provide, new walking and biking paths, public transit, and parking management.

Combined, these projects, corridor plans, and the RTP/SCS are expanding the transportation system to address congestion and provide new mobility options.

Similarly, when reviewing development and redevelopment projects additional auto congestion (i.e., traffic jams and lack of parking) cannot be addressed by simply expanding the roadways. Instead, auto trip reduction programs and improvements to other modes must be used (e.g., parking pricing, expanded transit service, new and continuous bicycle and pedestrian paths).

To attribute these impacts and mitigation requirements fairly and consistently to development and redevelopment projects, new project level analysis tools will identify the appropriate mitigation, for example by requiring the development or improvement of one mode to offset an impact on another (contributing to or adding a transit line or micro-transit service to mitigate vehicle congestion). The improvements in each mode must be based on, and tie directly to, the improvements called for in the RTP/SCS and corridor plans because these are the plans for attaining and maintaining the VMT/resident and visitor population standard and improving mobility. This project level analysis approach will be used in coordination with local governments to address new development and redevelopment projects.

To measure and apply this type of mitigation, multi-modal level of service (MMLOS) standards may be used. Currently, TRPA utilizes mode share as a performance measure. As the Tahoe Region addresses transportation system needs by improving multi-modal mobility and developing these project level analysis tools, development of MMLOS standards will be considered and possibly implemented.

The air quality mitigation fee will be more appropriately relabeled the “mobility mitigation fee” and updated based on the tool and standards selected. The project level tool will calculate the projected VMT generated by the development or redevelopment project, whether it is a significant VMT impact, and allow the applicant to incorporate VMT mitigations to reduce the impact. Development and redevelopment projects will pay the mobility mitigation fee for VMT they generate, regardless of whether it is significant or not. Development or redevelopment projects may provide the multi-modal improvements that the project level tool indicates are needed for mitigation to offset all or part of the fee. The new mobility mitigation fee revenues must then be coupled with other resources (e.g., new funding sources) to fully implement the multi-modal mobility approach to handling congestion and address the environmental impacts of VMT.

The process and timeline for development of this new project level analysis tool and updating the mitigation fee is shown below.

Task Description (Committee/Board)	August	September	October	November	December
Introduce work plan elements, review existing and best practices research, and next steps for feedback (TTAC)					
Introduce work plan elements, review existing and best practices research, and next steps for feedback (RPIC)					
Draft proposals for implementation tools from nexus study, proposed updates to code/procedures/etc., and next steps for feedback (TTAC)					
Final project impact assessment, mitigation fee, and Code and procedural updates for recommendation (APC)					

Final project impact assessment, mitigation fee, Code and procedural updates, and APC input for recommendation (RPIC)					
Final project impact assessment, mitigation fee, Code and procedural updates, and APC and RPIC input for approval (GB)					

APC – Advisory Planning Commission

GB – Governing Board

RPIC – Regional Plan Implementation Committee

TTAC – Transportation Technical Advisory Committee

Contact Information:

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