
STAFF REPORT

Date: December 11, 2019

To: TRPA Regional Plan Implementation Committee

From: TRPA Staff

Subject: VMT Threshold Update – System Overview

Summary:

The Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT) Threshold Update workplan includes the development of new mobility/transportation goals and standards for the Region and an associated implementation strategy and framework to achieve those goals. Achieving the goals relies on coordinated land use and transportation planning. The interaction between land use and transportation planning in the Region is complex and often misunderstood. This presentation will provide an overview of the interrelationships and dependencies of program elements and their relationship to the VMT threshold update initiative. The presentation will also address how VMT will be retained as a planning principle and as an action forcing mechanism to encourage project design that promotes the goals of the Regional Plan. The presentation is offered for information purposes only.

Background:

Historically land-use and transportation planning have been siloed into separate planning disciplines, ignoring the natural feedback loop between the two. Land-use planning guides where people live, stay, work, shop, and recreate, which in turn influences travel decisions and development of the transportation system. Ease of navigating the landscape (travel time and comfort) in turn influences preferences for where people shop, eat, and live, influencing investment decisions and shaping the land-use patterns of the future. In Tahoe, the silo between the two was dissolved earlier than it was in most regions. The Bi-State Compact directs TRPA to maintain a Regional Plan to limit and guide development, inclusive of a transportation plan to establish the connective tissue that allows people to navigate the landscape to achieve the goals of the Regional Plan.

The VMT Threshold Update workplan includes development of new goals and standards in two focus areas; 1) To increase non-automobile mode share, and 2) to reduce mobile source greenhouse gas emissions. Achieving those goals will require updating and aligning the complimentary implementing mechanisms in the Regional Plan and Regional Transportation Plan (RTP).

The Regional Plan limits overall development in the Region and contains policies that incentivize redevelopment within the Region's town centers. Promoting redevelopment in Tahoe's town centers benefits multiple environmental objectives including the water quality and lake clarity objectives, scenic standards for the built environment, and reduced reliance on private automobiles by locating residents and visitors close to work, services, and recreational amenities. The Regional Transportation Plan compliments the policies of the Regional Plan by focusing on strategies and infrastructure to reduce reliance on the automobile and promote walkable bikeable communities. Unlike other areas, the Tahoe Region's RTP does not include construction of new highways or expressways to meet forecasted increased demand, instead the RTP focuses on trip reduction policies and programs, connecting trails, and increasing transit. At the Regional Plan level, interest and comments we have received have primarily focused on how to assure action forcing mechanisms exist at the project level to achieve the integration of transportation and land use goals. Towards this end, most comments urge an action-forcing project level metric and an update to the air quality mitigation fee, both of which will likely be modified as a result of the VMT threshold update. The presentation will discuss the role of each.

In conversations and through comments received, we understand that some stakeholders would like to see VMT established as a de facto development cap. Because other more direct measures are adopted to cap development in the Regional Plan, there is not now a proposal to use VMT as a cap on regional development. Nonetheless, VMT will have an enduring role in regional planning and project evaluation. The goals of promoting regional mobility and reducing greenhouse gas emissions are linked to automobile travel, trip generation, and VMT. At the project level, reducing VMT generation is currently, and will be maintained as a core planning principle. Specifically, project impact assessment will include analysis of project impact on VMT as an action forcing mechanism for better project design.

The presentation and discussion at the December 18, 2019 meeting of the RPIC will include an overview of the different elements of the initiative and how they fit together and provide a comprehensive framework to achieve the region's goals.

Contact Information:

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