



COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO

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CLERK OF THE BOARD  
OF SUPERVISORS

# COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO

## BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

1600 PACIFIC HIGHWAY, ROOM 335, SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA 92101-2470

### AGENDA ITEM

**DATE:** March 3, 2021

**04**

**TO:** Board of Supervisors

#### **SUBJECT**

**ALIGNING COUNTY VMT POLICY WITH CEQA, SB 743, AND OPR TECHNICAL ADVISORY (DISTRICTS: ALL)**

#### **OVERVIEW**

San Diego as a region is projected to experience severe impacts of global climate change, including drought, floods, greater frequency and intensity of storm events, sea level rise, coastal erosion, and fire. As such, the County of San Diego is committed to working with municipalities across the region to implement bold, innovative, collaborative climate solutions that meet and exceed the state's greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions mandates.

Roughly half of our state and county's greenhouse gas emissions are attributable to the transportation sector. In 2013, in an effort to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions associated with transportation and to discourage carbon-intensive land uses, the California State Legislature passed and Governor Brown signed SB 743 (Steinberg). SB 743 and the subsequent implementing Technical Advisory from the Office of Planning and Research (OPR) established vehicle miles traveled (VMT) as the most appropriate criteria for assessing a project's transportation-associated GHG impacts, and VMT mitigation to be the most effective strategy for reducing the long-term climate impacts of the state's transportation sector. The OPR Technical Advisory further advised jurisdictions to utilize the "region" to determine the baseline average VMT per capita against which to compare proposed residential projects in unincorporated areas.

On June 24, 2020, the San Diego County Board of Supervisors adopted the Final Transportation Study Guide, which included a threshold of significance of 15% below the average VMT per capita of the Unincorporated County and a screening threshold of 110 average daily trips (ADT). Taken together, these two thresholds established a presumption of insignificant VMT impacts for potential projects in the Unincorporated County under SB 743.

This Board believes that the decision to adopt the Unincorporated County as the geographical boundary for purposes of establishing the baseline average VMT per capita and 110 ADT as the

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screening threshold significantly impaired the County's efforts to reduce transportation and land use related GHG emissions. The Board therefore instructs the Chief Administrative Officer to suspend use of the "Unincorporated Region" as the geographic boundary for determination of significant VMT impacts, and revise the Transportation Study Guide (TSG) to utilize the 'San Diego region' rather than the 'Unincorporated County' as the geographic boundary, to eliminate 110 ADT as a screening criteria, and to return to the Board for adoption of amendments to the TSG with alternative screening or de minimis criteria after public review of the revisions.

**RECOMMENDATION(S)**

**SUPERVISOR TERRA LAWSON-REMER AND VICE CHAIR NORA VARGAS**

1. Find that the proposed actions are exempt from CEQA per CEQA Guidelines Sections 15060(c), 15308 and 15061(b)(3).
2. Direct the Chief Administrative Officer to suspend use of the "Unincorporated Region" as the geographic boundary for determination of significant VMT impacts.
3. Direct the Chief Administrative Officer to revise the Final Transportation Study Guidelines (June 2020) to A) replace the "Unincorporated County" with the "San Diego region" as the geographic boundary for purposes of establishing baseline average VMT per capita and B) strike all reference to the "screening threshold" of 110 average daily trips (ADT) and return to the Board within 120 days for adoption of amendments to the Final Transportation Study Guidelines with alternative screening criteria for the determination of de minimis individual and cumulative project transportation-related VMT impacts after public review of the revisions.

**FISCAL IMPACT**

There is no fiscal impact associated with these recommendations.

**BUSINESS IMPACT STATEMENT**

N/A

**ADVISORY BOARD STATEMENT**

N/A

**BACKGROUND**

Roughly half of our state and county's greenhouse gas emissions are attributable to the transportation sector. In 2013, in an effort to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions associated with transportation and to discourage carbon-intensive land uses, the California State Legislature passed and Governor Brown signed SB 743 (Steinberg). SB 743 required the Office of Planning and Research (OPR) to prepare criteria for assessing the environmental impacts of projects under CEQA.

In December of 2018 OPR released its required Technical Advisory. OPR's 2018 Technical Advisory established vehicle miles traveled (VMT) as the most appropriate criteria for assessing a project's transportation-associated GHG impacts and found VMT mitigation to be the most effective strategy for reducing the long-term climate impacts of the state's transportation sector. In addition, "for residential projects in unincorporated areas," it established "the region's VMT per capita" as the baseline average against which projects should be compared.

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On June 24, 2020, the San Diego County Board of Supervisors adopted the final Transportation Study Guide (TSG). The June 2020 TSG included a threshold of significance of 15% below the average VMT per capita of the Unincorporated County, rather than the ‘region’ per OPR guidance, and a screening threshold of 110 average daily trips (ADT). Taken together, these two thresholds established a presumption of less than significant VMT impacts for potential projects in the Unincorporated County under SB 743. The addition of these two thresholds dramatically reduced the effectiveness of the TSG in reducing VMTs, GHG emissions, carbon-intensive land uses, and co-morbid health impacts.

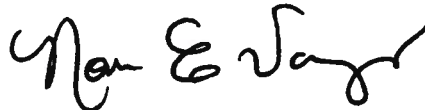
**LINKAGE TO THE COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO STRATEGIC PLAN**

Today’s proposed action to direct amendment of the Transportation Study Guidelines (June 2020) supports the County of San Diego’s 2021-2026 Strategic Plan by advancing the Sustainable Environments/Thriving Initiative through the reduction of GHG emissions, habitat loss, and the frequency, distance, and duration of commutes and the Build Better Health Initiative through associated co-benefits of improved air quality and access to amenities and services.

Respectfully submitted,



TERRA LAWSON-REMER  
Supervisor, 3rd District



NORA VARGAS  
Vice Chair, 1st District

**ATTACHMENT(S)**

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**AGENDA ITEM INFORMATION SHEET**

**REQUIRES FOUR VOTES:**       Yes     No

**WRITTEN DISCLOSURE PER COUNTY CHARTER SECTION 1000.1 REQUIRED**

Yes     No

**PREVIOUS RELEVANT BOARD ACTIONS:**

June 24, 2020, Options to Comply with Senate Bill 743 and Implement Vehicle Miles Traveled  
in Local Planning and Environmental Review.

**BOARD POLICIES APPLICABLE:**

N/A

**BOARD POLICY STATEMENTS:**

N/A

**MANDATORY COMPLIANCE:**

N/A

**ORACLE AWARD NUMBER(S) AND CONTRACT AND/OR REQUISITION  
NUMBER(S):**

N/A

**ORIGINATING DEPARTMENT:** N/A

**OTHER CONCURRENCE(S):** N/A

**CONTACT PERSON(S):**

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