



## City of Sebastopol Planning Commission Staff Report

Meeting Date: July 25, 2023  
Agenda Item: 7A  
To: Planning Commission  
From: Kari Svanstrom, Planning Director  
John Jay, Associate Planner  
Ian Barnes, Fehr & Peers  
Subject: Vehicle-Miles Traveled (VMT) Threshold Project  
Recommendation: Receive Presentation

### **Introduction:**

This meeting is to kick-off a policy update related to the City's analysis of transportation impact metrics for the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) to comply with State Law (SB743) related to Greenhouse gas emissions and Vehicle-Miles Traveled. The City received a grant award for this project from the State, and has retained Fehr & Peers, a transportation engineering/consulting firm, to assist the City with this project. Fehr & Peers has done a significant amount of work for the Sonoma County Transportation Authority (SCTA), including travel modeling that included the City of Sebastopol and surrounding areas. They have also developed "SB743" screening maps for SCTA which includes VMT tools and screening maps. Working with Fehr & Peers will save money as they have already developed background information on VMT within the County and Sebastopol, including VMT mapping tools (the contract scope reflects this savings already).

The project will review what VMT is, and how it differs from prior (Level of Service, or LOS) analysis; how VMT is used in CEQA; assist the City in developing VMT metrics/thresholds for the City to adopt and additional criteria during VMT review; and, also provide guidance on potential mitigations that could be applied to projects.

### **Background:**

The State of California adopted SB743, effective 2020, which shifts transportation impact metrics for the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) from vehicle level of service (LOS), a measure of roadway capacity that assigns a letter grade to roadway performance (A to F, similar to scholastic grades), to vehicle-miles traveled (VMT), a metric that accounts for the number of vehicle trips generated and the length or distance of those trips. (See also the

following video “What is VMT”: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UE4TJItVdJ8> ). The shift to VMT changes the focus of CEQA Transportation analysis from “how does a project impact drivers” to “what is the environmental impact of driving resulting from the project.”

The switch to the VMT metric will enable the City to more closely align CEQA Transportation section analysis with goals and policies related to sustainability and climate. However, the VMT analysis methods and thresholds present unique challenges for agencies on the periphery of an MPO that are served by limited/infrequent transit services and/or that have a high driving mode share.

Under SB743, the City must decide what level of VMT change caused by a project would constitute a significant transportation impact when a project undergoes CEQA analysis. Currently, VMT needs to be done individually on each project subject to CEQA review under overall State guidelines. Additionally, the City has not identified mitigations that would be appropriate to reduce VMT or screening criteria that would allow projects to be presumed to have a less-than-significant impact on VMT. It is noted that screening of VMT impacts in the CEQA Transportation section is subject to staff approval.

This report will include a presentation by staff and the consultant, followed by any questions or discussion by the Planning Commission to be part of the project.

**General Plan Consistency:**

This project supports the General Plan Goals and policies as follows:

**Goal CIR 5: Reduce Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT) in Order to Reduce Congestion and Help Achieve Regional Efforts to Reduce Greenhouse Gas (GHG) Emissions**

Policy CIR 5-1: Actively support the Regional Climate Protection Authority (RCPA) in its efforts to reduce GHG emissions and strive to meet its regional goals.

Policy CIR 5-2: Ensure that the City’s Trip Reduction Program (Municipal Code Section 8.16) is implemented. The purpose of the City’s Trip Reduction ordinance is to reduce traffic and improve air quality within the City of Sebastopol by promoting the development of Trip Reduction Programs (also referred to as Transportation Demand Management Programs, or TDM) at existing and future work sites. Examples of TDM programs may include (but are not limited to) subsidized transit passes, guaranteed ride home, carpool matching, telecommuting, alternative work schedules, car sharing, employer-sponsored vanpools, priced workplace parking, preferential parking for carpools and/or low-emission vehicles, and shower facilities at workplaces to support bike riding.

Policy CIR 5-3: Support the establishment and expansion of a regional network of electric vehicle charging stations and encourage the expanded use of electric vehicles.

**Actions in Support of Goal CIR 5**

*Action CIR 5a: Supply transportation data to the RCPA as requested to assist in the assessment of GHG reduction efforts.*

*Action CIR 5b: Establish specific TDM requirements that is consistent with the City's Trip Reduction Program for projects and consider making requirements sector-based (e.g., residential, commercial, industrial).*

*Action CIR 5c: Complete surveys of employment trips as outlined in the City's Trip Reduction Program.*

*Action CIR 5d: Establish standards and requirements for electric vehicle parking, including the installation of electric vehicle charging stations, in new development projects.*

**Public Comment:**

No public comments have been received as of the writing of this staff report.

**Recommendation:**

Receive the presentation and provide discussion. No decisions will be made at this meeting.

**Attachments:**

General Plan Circulation Element

Consultant scope of work

2019 white paper by Fehr & Peers on VMT in Sonoma County

**Related, but not part of this discussion:**

If you are interested in learning more about existing travel patterns in Sonoma County and Sebastopol, See SCTA (Sonoma County Transportation Authority):

[https://scta.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Sonoma\\_TBS\\_2-7-2020\\_web.pdf](https://scta.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Sonoma_TBS_2-7-2020_web.pdf)

and

<https://scta.ca.gov/library-archive/#toggle-id-12>