Understanding California's Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT) Requirements: A User-Friendly Guide

What is VMT and How is it Calculated?

Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT) measures the total driving distance associated with a project, considering the number and length of trips. Curious to learn more? Check out this short video: Understanding VMT

New Requirements Began July 1, 2020

With new development increasing throughout the state, thereby increasing the amount of driving on roads and highways, California now requires all agencies to analyze and address the increase in VMT for development projects. This includes new homes, retail centers, warehouses, and even new road projects.

Senate Bill 743: The Driving Force

Passed in 2013 and effective in 2020, SB 743 requires projects to analyze and mitigate their VMT impacts. This builds on previous regulations set in the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) which requires public agencies to evaluate and lessen environmental impacts.

Mitigating VMT: A Unique Challenge

Unlike other environmental impacts, there's no established consensus on how best to mitigate VMT. The calculation can be complicated since travel often overlaps into multiple jurisdictions. To understand travel patterns, refer to the WRCOG's travel analysis survey.

The Regional VMT Mitigation Program

To assist our member agencies in addressing VMT mitigation, WRCOG is considering a voluntary program to create VMT credits. These credits can be used by projects needing to offset their VMT impact.

How Does the Program Work?

VMT credits are earned by reducing car trips - think transit passes, van pools, improved bus stops, or bike lanes. WRCOG would manage these credits, allowing developers to purchase them as needed, with the funds going back into projects that reduce VMT.

Benefits of a Regional Program

Regional Impact: VMT reduction is most effective when addressed regionally.

Cost Sharing: It is financially beneficial to pool resources.

Ease of Administration: WRCOG will handle the complex tracking and reporting, simplifying the process for individual agencies.

Is Participation Mandatory?

No, agencies can choose to join the Regional VMT Mitigation Program, and there is no cost to join the voluntary Program.

Compliance with SB743

All public agencies must comply with SB 743. Non-compliance could lead to legal challenges. This law aligns with broader state goals for reducing vehicle emissions (AB 32 and SB 375).

Who Pays for VMT Mitigation?

Developers bear the cost for private projects. Public sector projects, like roads and public buildings, will have their agencies cover the costs, in addition to other environmental mitigation expenses.

Is This a Tax?

No, these are one-time costs paid before construction, similar to other environmental impact mitigations (similar to noise or air quality).

Is This the State's VMT Fee?

No, this isn't the VMT fee discussed for funding infrastructure maintenance. The Regional VMT Mitigation Program is separate, aiming to help developments meet CEQA requirements.

WRCOG is here to assist your City!

WRCOG is collaborating with stakeholders to refine the Regional VMT Program. A program manual will soon be developed to outline participant roles, processes, and more, pending review and approval by various committees.

This guide aims to clarify the new VMT requirements and the proactive steps being taken to manage its impacts regionally. Your understanding and participation are crucial in shaping a sustainable and responsible development future.

Contact Us

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