

Western Riverside Council of Governments

Regional VMT Mitigation Program Implementation Manual

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WESTERN RIVERSIDE COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS VOLUNTARY VMT MITIGATION EXCHANGE PROGRAM MANUAL



I. INTRODUCTION

The Western Riverside Council of Governments (WRCOG), in partnership with its member agencies and key regional stakeholders, has developed a voluntary exchange program (Program) to provide a method to mitigate vehicle miles traveled (VMT) impacts under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). WRCOG will serve as the Program Administrator and main point of coordination for Program Participants, which could include regional agencies, WRCOG member agencies, and other stakeholders, as appropriate.

The requirement to analyze and mitigate VMT impacts as part of a CEQA document is an emerging field. While there is substantial empirical data regarding the effectiveness of various VMT mitigation measures, there is less certainty regarding how VMT mitigation programs might be utilized, particularly by parties needing to find ways to offset their VMT impacts.

Through the Program, Program Participants in need of a way to offset significant VMT impacts will be able to purchase VMT credits generated by participants with VMT credit-generating projects. As a result, credit-using projects will not be delayed due to an inability to offset VMT impacts, and credit-generating projects may be expedited due to access to funding. The Program is voluntary and applicants who are unable to secure credits or unwilling to comply with the various requirements can pursue other opportunities for VMT mitigation through alternative means.

This Program Manual establishes rules and procedures intended to cover most anticipated situations and provides some level of flexibility to adjust to changing circumstances. If there is a case in which the Program Manual does not fully anticipate a circumstance or discretion is required, WRCOG commits that it will exercise its discretion in an impartial, transparent, and collaborative fashion. WRCOG is well suited to serve as an impartial administrator, able to act in the best interests of the overall program rather than themselves, because WRCOG does not generate or use credits.

WRCOG reserves the right to take action in the best interest of the Program to best serve all participants. These actions could include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Limiting the number of credits available to one applicant.
- Choosing not to provide credits to an applicant if such a restriction is determined to be in the best interest of the program.
- Deferring the provision of credits until a later date for various reasons.
- Withholding credits from applicants who are unwilling to sign the appropriate agreements.

Applicants who are requesting credits from the Program have the right to appeal any decision made by the Program Administrator and will be allowed to utilize the formal appeal process, provided they have standing to appeal, as described in Section III.D.9.c.i.

This Program Manual is intended to be a living document. As State regulatory guidance changes and the program evolves, WRCOG will regularly update the Program Manual to reflect these changing conditions. Any updates will be prepared and implemented in conjunction with our regional partners, WRCOG member agencies, and other stakeholders, as appropriate.

II. BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

A. Senate Bill 743 and Vehicle Miles Traveled

Before a California public agency issues a discretionary approval that authorizes an action with potential environmental impacts, the agency must first comply with CEQA and disclose potential impacts to the environment. For example, before a city or a county approves a site-development project, and before a transportation agency approves the construction of new infrastructure, those agencies must ensure that CEQA compliance has been completed.

Unless an action is exempt from substantive environmental review, an agency is most often faced with the choice of preparing either a CEQA Negative Declaration or, Mitigated Negative Declaration (MND), or an Environmental Impact Report (EIR). Either an MND or EIR may involve the imposition of “mitigation measures” which help to address or reduce a project’s potentially significant impacts.

The manner in which transportation effects are analyzed under CEQA changed dramatically when Senate Bill 743 (SB 743) was adopted in 2013 and codified in Public Resources Code section 21099. This law and its implementing regulations require that

transportation impacts throughout the state no longer be measured in terms of vehicle delay, but instead in terms of how many VMT a project generates. The purposes of SB 743 are to place greater focus on implementing the State’s goals of reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, promoting transit, and increasing infill development.

For many agencies, the threshold of how much VMT triggers the requirement for an EIR varies. But, in some instances, that threshold may be reached- even for projects that align with the State’s goals of reducing GHG emissions, promoting transit, increasing infill development, and building more housing.- When significant impacts are identified, CEQA requires that feasible mitigation measures be proposed. If all feasible mitigation is exhausted and there is still a significant impact, a statement of overriding considerations must be issued which would trigger an EIR. This adds further cost and time to project implementation.

SB 743 has a disproportionately heavy impact on less-developed counties (like Riverside County) because those areas have not yet fully built-out their roadway networks, have less robust non-automotive travel options (like transit), and lack institutional support facilities. Thus, developments in Riverside County are far more likely to constitute “new” development, rather than “infill” projects, and are far more likely to generate VMT effects that require a full EIR, rather than a streamlined Negative Declaration/Mitigated Negative Declaration (or potential exemption). Thus, there is a demand for a dependable means of reliably mitigating or offsetting VMT impacts that would arise from development and transportation projects.

B. Need for a Regional VMT Mitigation Program

Transportation demand management strategies have traditionally been utilized to change travel behavior as a way of reducing VMT. These strategies are generally most effective in urban areas where a project site is accessible through multiple travel modes (i.e., walking, bicycling, transit, and personal micro-mobility vehicles), offering similar travel times and convenience. These strategies are less effective in low-density suburban and rural areas where travel modes are more reliant upon personal automobiles. Much of Western Riverside County falls into this latter category and needs a coordinated regional approach.

C. Different Types of Regional VMT Mitigation Programs

In more suburban and rural areas, a program-based approach to VMT mitigation is typically more effective than applying strategies to a project site only. Following is a review of three common program-based approaches that may be established to enable mitigation options for projects required to implement VMT mitigation:

- VMT Impact Fee Program – is a traditional impact fee program in compliance with the Mitigation Fee Act. The nexus for the fee program is a VMT reduction goal consistent with the CEQA threshold established by a lead agency for SB 743 purposes. The main difference from a fee program based on a metric such as vehicle level of service (LOS) is that the VMT reduction nexus results in a capital improvement program consisting largely of transit, bicycle, and pedestrian projects. These types of fee programs are time-consuming to develop, monitor, and maintain but are recognized as an acceptable form of CEQA mitigation.
- VMT Mitigation Exchange – relies on a Credit User agreeing to fund, implement, or acquire a predetermined VMT reducing project or propose a new one. The project may be located in the vicinity of the project needing VMT mitigation or elsewhere in the community, and possibly outside the community. The VMT Mitigation Exchange needs to have a facilitating entity that can match the VMT producer (the development/ infrastructure project) with a VMT reducing project or action. The facilitating entity could be the lead agency or another entity that can provide the match and document the VMT reduction with substantial evidence. This option provides the most flexibility for mitigation project selection and is also the least complex to set up. Implementation is completed on a project-by-project basis, similar to typical mitigation measures.
- VMT Mitigation Bank – attempts to create a monetary value for VMT reduction such that a Credit User could purchase VMT reduction credits. The money exchanged for credits could be applied to local, regional, or state-level VMT reduction projects or programs. Like all VMT mitigation, substantial evidence is necessary to demonstrate that the projects covered by the VMT Mitigation Bank would achieve expected VMT reductions and some form of monitoring may be required. This is more complicated than a simple exchange and requires more time and effort to set up and implement. However, the VMT Mitigation Bank can include other VMT reducing efforts (like rideshare or telecommute programs) that cannot be implemented in a VMT Impact Fee Program and would be more difficult to implement in a VMT Mitigation Exchange program. The verification of how much VMT reduction is associated with each dollar or credit and tracking mitigation completion are more difficult parts of the VMT Mitigation Bank. Perhaps the most

restrictive component of a VMT Mitigation Bank is that VMT reduction credits need to be generated prior to their ability to be purchased; which necessitates some level of seed funding to implement projects or programs to begin generating the VMT credits prior to them being sold.

The option that best fits the needs of Western Riverside County currently is an exchange program given some of the constraints noted above. WRCOG will serve as the facilitating entity (VMT Program Administrator) and will be responsible for administering the program.

D. Definitions

- **Applicant:** A developer or similar entity applying to purchase *credit(s)* as a *credit user*.
- **Credit:** VMT reduction credit.
- **Credit Generator:** A public agency that implements a project or program that produces a VMT reduction credit. Credit generators will enter into a Participation Agreement with the *Program Administrator*. This agreement enables public agencies to submit *credit-generating items* to the Program that are eligible to receive funding through the Program.
- **Credit-generating Item:** A specific project or program that has produced or may produce a *credit*.
- **Credit User:** Land development or transportation project administrator that needs VMT reduction credits for CEQA mitigation.
- **Implementing Agency:** A public agency responsible for implementing a public sector project for those cases in which another agency is designated as a lead agency for purposes of CEQA.
- **Lead Agency:** The public agency that has primary responsibility for carrying out or approving a project that is subject to CEQA.
- **Program Administrator:** The entity responsible for managing the Program and facilitating VMT mitigation exchange. WRCOG serves as the Program Administrator.
- **VMT Impact:** The generation of VMT above the applicable threshold of significance by a project, which may require a *Credit User* to seek a mitigating *credit(s)*.

III. THE VOLUNTARY VMT EXCHANGE PROGRAM

A. General Description and How it Works

Following is a brief description of the major steps to facilitating a VMT mitigation exchange:

1. The Program Administrator requests credit-generating items from Credit Generators to be included on a list of potential credit-generating items that have produced or may produce a credit(s) and the Program Administrator maintains the list of items.
2. Credit Generators submit credit-generating items on a processing form that details the project/program cost and description and certifies the project/program is ready for implementation, as defined by the qualification criteria in this Program Manual (see Section IV). For the purposes of the Program, active steps taken to implement the project/program being submitted as a credit-generating item is implementation. Additional clarification is provided in the Participation Agreement (Appendix A).
3. Credit Users generate a significant VMT impact and need to purchase credits to mitigate those impacts. The cost of credits is project/program specific.
4. Credit Users submit a form indicating that the Credit User generates a significant VMT impact and is applying to purchase credits to mitigate impacts. If the Credit User is not a public agency, the application must be reviewed by the CEQA lead agency to verify application details before credits are issued.

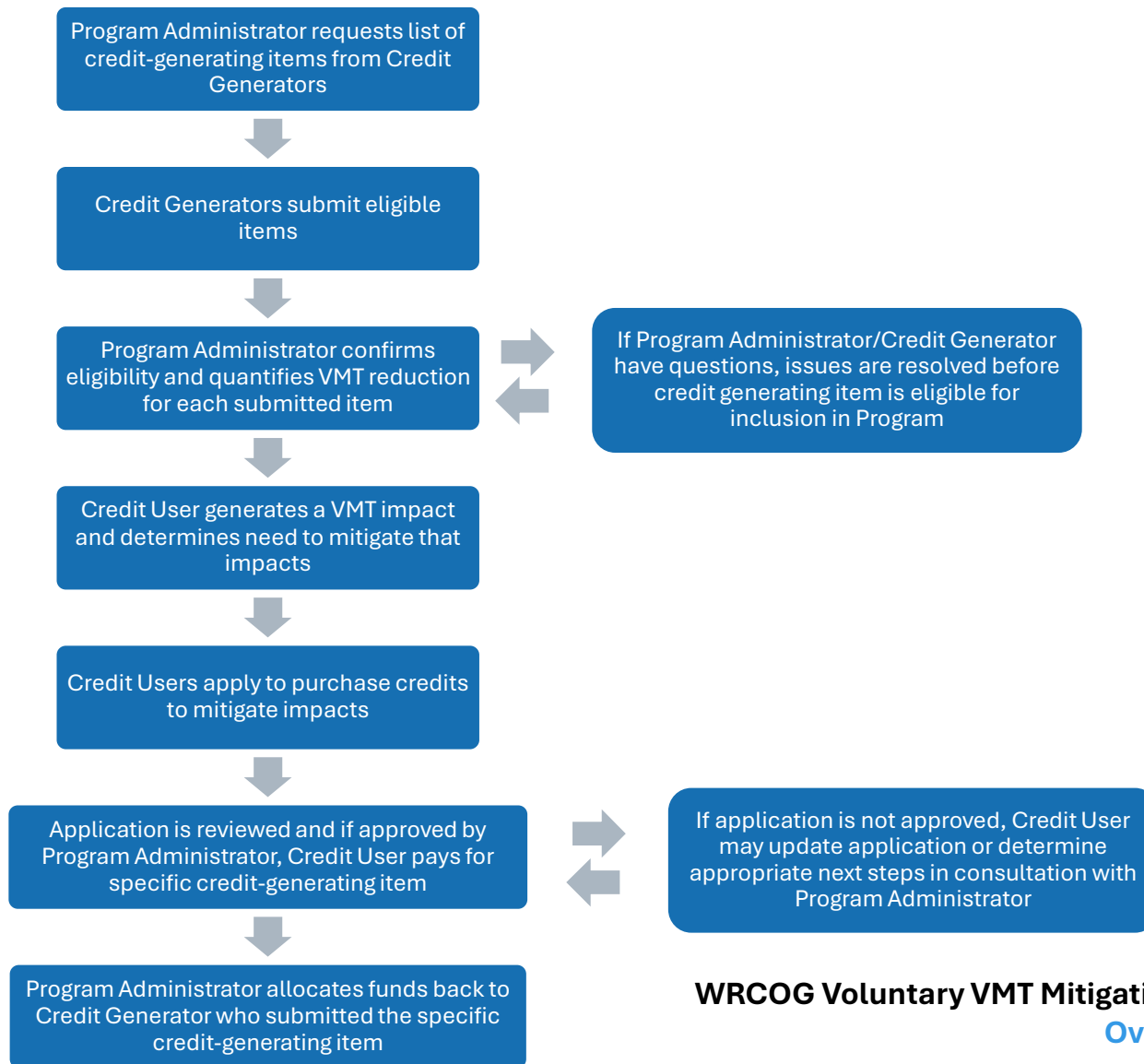
Note: Mitigation measures must equal or exceed the amount of the VMT impact to fully mitigate the project impact under CEQA.

5. Funds are collected by the Program Administrator and allocated to the specific Credit Generator whose credit-generating item was selected by the Credit User.

A description of the overall process is provided as Exhibit 1.

B. Potential Types of VMT Mitigation Projects (Credit-Generating Items)

The following potential credit-generating items do not represent an exhaustive list of potential VMT-reducing projects or programs. Currently, the California Air Pollution Control Officers Association (CAPCOA) Handbook for Analyzing Greenhouse Gas Emission Reductions, Assessing Climate Vulnerabilities, and Advancing Health and Equity (CAPCOA, December 2024) is the best source for the latest data and research for quantification of credit-generating items. As new data, studies, and information become available, additional projects/programs may be incorporated as credit-generating items, beyond what is currently identified by CAPCOA.



WRCOG Voluntary VMT Mitigation Exchange Program
Overall Program Process

Any credit-generating item that is incorporated into the Program must provide sufficient information that would allow the Program Administrator’s technical experts to quantify the credits that would be available during the Program. The Program Administrator has the flexibility to revisit the projects or programs included in the Program on an annual basis to ensure the projects or programs are achieving the intended mitigation amount as costs, information, and other variables change.

As noted above, the Program Administrator will be responsible for working with its technical experts to calculate VMT credits using information supplied by the Credit Generator. Credit users, such as CEQA lead agencies, may then choose which credit generating project(s) best align with their mitigation needs. As such, the Credit Users would have the opportunity to rely upon and accept the VMT-reduction analysis completed by the Program Administrator’s technical expert. WRCOG will also provide the VMT reduction calculations to the Credit User at their request.

Potential Credit-Generating Items include but are not limited to the following:

1. Operations/Maintenance Projects

- Transit Network Coverage or Hours Extension: Adding or modifying transit operations to include more hours of existing routes/lines or fund the operations of a new transit route/line.
- Transit Service Frequency Increase: Modifying and funding transit operations to include more frequent service on an existing transit line.

2. Ongoing Programs

- Transit Passes: Providing discounted or free transit fare to a specific geographic area, population group, or the general public.
- Vanpool Program: Providing financial support for a vehicle to groups of 5 to 15 people for the purpose of carpooling between their workplaces and residences.
- Rideshare Program: Providing access to and encouraging the use of a ridesharing alternative, platform, or service. This could be an app, website, or other service that provides ride-matching coordination services.

3. Capital Improvements

- Pedestrian Network Improvement: Constructing new sidewalks and/or improving damaged or substandard sidewalks that connect to a larger pedestrian network.
- Bike Facility Construction or Improvement: Constructing new or enhancing an existing Class I, II, or IV bike facility.
- Transit-Supportive Roadway Treatments: Funding infrastructure improvements, such as traffic signal modifications and roadway signage and striping, that are dedicated to improving transit travel times and reliability.
- Transit Access, Safety, and Comfort Improvements: Funding infrastructure improvements that reduce the barriers to using transit, including new or enhanced features, such as, but not limited to, bus shelters, lighting, bike racks, crosswalks, transit security guards, and/or ambassadors and bus turnouts or bus pads.

4. Property Acquisition for Conservation Purposes

Property acquisition for conservation purposes is not included in CAPCOA's Handbook and would require technical documentation and substantial evidence to support Program eligibility. This strategy would involve properties to be categorized as VMT efficient (VMT generation is lower than a defined threshold) or VMT inefficient areas (VMT is higher than a defined threshold). If land can be conserved for conservation in VMT inefficient areas, then the Program Administrator can consider designating the land acquisition as a credit-generating item.

5. Gap Financing for Affordable Infill Housing Development

Gap financing for affordable infill housing development is included in CAPCOA's 2024 Handbook and is a new strategy in mitigating VMT that is supported by Executive Order N-2-24. The order directed the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) to identify and implement opportunities to leverage transportation funds and projects to support the use of infill housing as an environmental mitigation approach by publishing guidance on the use of affordable infill housing as a mitigation strategy as part of its *Transportation Analysis Under CEQA* guidance and shall track and report progress at the project level.

C. Governance

As set forth in Section I, WRCOG is designated as the Program Administrator and shall administer the Program as described in this Program Manual. Following is a description of the duties, roles, and responsibilities for the WRCOG Executive Committee, Executive Director, and Planning Director's Committee, as they pertain to Program administration.

1. The **WRCOG Executive Committee**. The WRCOG Executive Committee shall be responsible for reviewing and acting on the following:
 - a. Approval of the Program Manual and any subsequent amendments;
 - b. Recommendation of changes to the template agreements regarding participation in the Program; and
 - c. Otherwise having full final decision-making authority over all aspects of the Program.

2. The **WRCOG Executive Director**. Reporting to the WRCOG Executive Committee, the Executive Director (or their designee) shall be responsible for the following Program activities:
 - a. Administration of the Program and processing of disputes;
 - b. Conducting ongoing monitoring of credit-generating items;
 - c. Providing consultant support to quantify credit-generating items;
 - d. Providing staff and consultant support to verify credit-generating items and credit users, as necessary.
 - e. Other related activities as directed by the WRCOG Executive Committee;
 - f. Executing Participation Agreements, Credit Purchase Agreements, and any amendments thereto;
 - g. Preparation of an Annual Report for consideration by the WRCOG Executive Committee detailing the status of the Program; and
 - h. Periodic preparation of a comprehensive Program review that includes an assessment of the credit quantification methods and preparation of recommendations on potential Program revisions for consideration by the WRCOG Executive Committee.

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3. The **WRCOG Planning Directors Committee (PDC)**. The PDC shall be responsible for the following:
- a. Providing Program updates and reviews and input on all supporting technical documentation;
 - b. Recommending revisions to the Program Manual; and
 - c. Providing additional assistance to the Program, as requested by the WRCOG Executive Committee.

D. Administration

This section lists the key administrative processes involved in the Program.

1. Payment Processing, Credit Disbursement to Credit Users, and Payment to Credit Generators

The Program Administrator shall receive all payments generated by the exchange of credits from Credit Users to Credit Generators for credit-generating items. The Program Administrator shall account for credits and disburse credits and payments for credit-generating items, in accordance with this Program Manual.

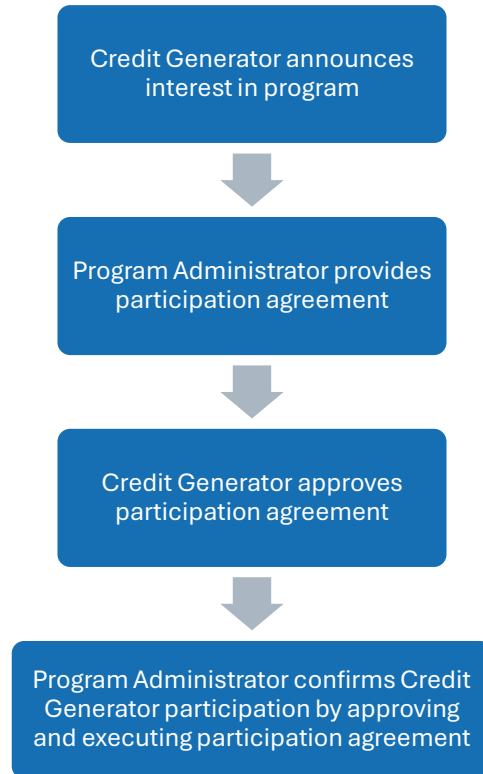
2. Credit Generator Opt In

A credit generator must opt in to the Program through execution of a Program Participation Agreement.

3. Credit Generator Opt Out

A credit generator would opt out of the Program by providing written notice to the Program Administrator. The credit generator will be removed from the program within 90 days of providing this notice. Credit generators may not opt out of the program if there are credit generating items for which a credit purchase agreement has been executed but have not been completed.

Exhibit 2 provides an overview of the process through which a credit generator could opt-into the program.



WRCOG Voluntary VMT Mitigation Exchange Program
Process for Credit Generators

A Credit Generator who has opted in can submit credit-generating items to the exchange through a Credit-Generating Item Form, provided that the credit-generating item meets the qualification criteria outlined in this Program Manual (see Section IV). The Credit-Generating Item Form will request the following:

- a. Credit-generating item description.
- b. Credit-generating item cost. Updates to costs of a credit-generating item already on the credit-generating item list may occur when the Program Administrator updates the list. A credit-generating item that is an operations item may include an annual escalator.
- c. Information to demonstrate that the proposed credit-generating item is ready to be utilized or constructed when funding is provided).
- d. Sufficient information to allow the Program Administrator technical expert to quantify the VMT reduction.

Exhibit 3 outlines the process by which a Credit Generator provides credit-generating items to the Program.

4. Applications for Credits by Credit Users

- a. An application must be submitted by credit users, as noted below, based on the type of credits, with VMT or environmental impact quantified to confirm the need to purchase credits to mitigate an impact. Any application must be submitted by the lead agency or lead jurisdiction where the VMT or environmental impact takes place to verify that credits are needed.

For Transportation Projects: The application must be submitted by the Implementing Agency (the Riverside County Transportation Commission, or any jurisdiction within the Western Riverside County subregion).

For Development Projects: The application must be submitted by the CEQA lead agency.

Credit users are not required to enter into a participation agreement but will enter into contractual agreements for each application.

- b. The Program Administrator will provide the list of available credit-generating items that can be purchased by the Credit User.

Exhibits 4 and 5 document the process by which a Credit User can request credits.

5. Procedure for Disbursement of Mitigation Projects

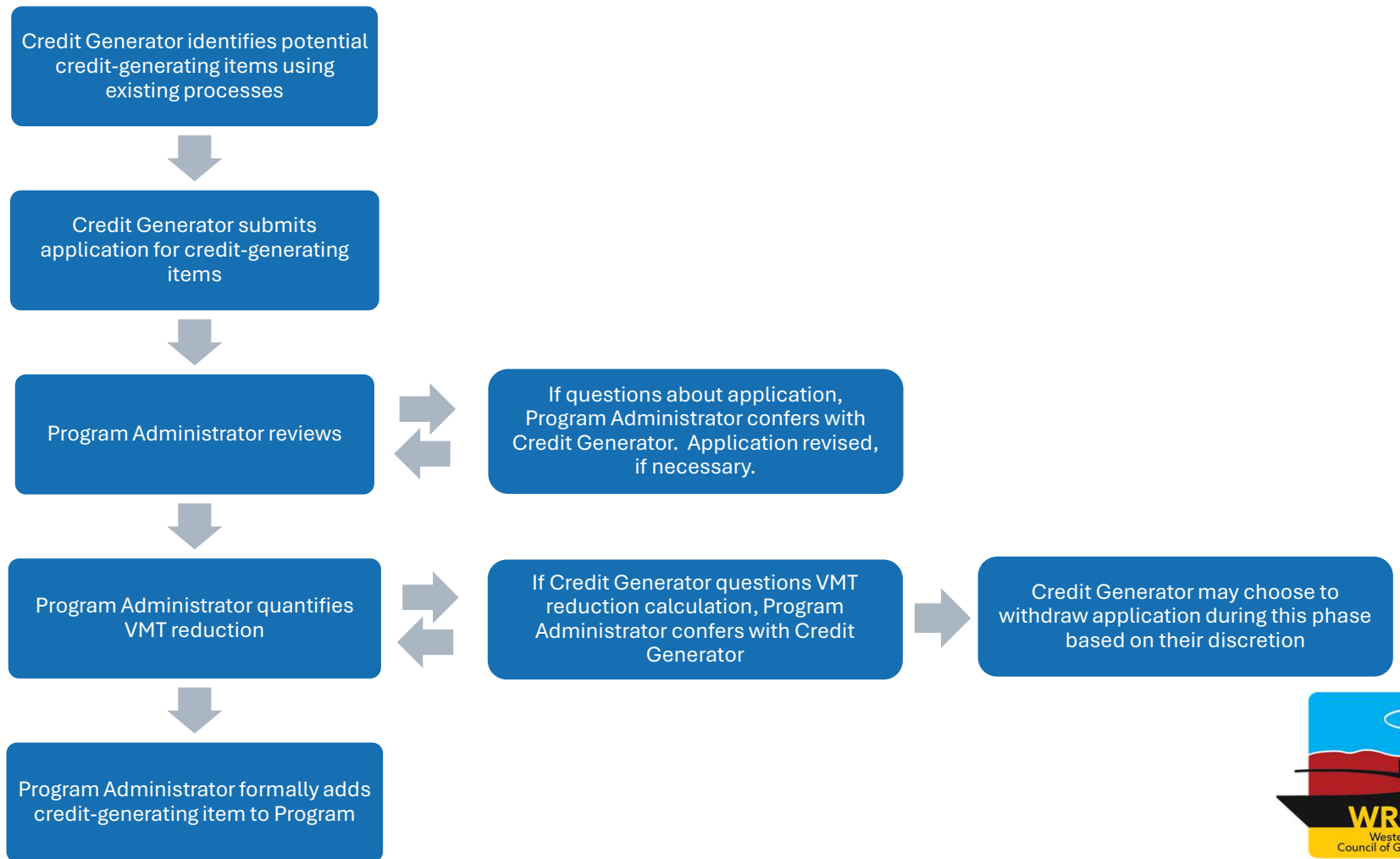
- a. Credits will be distributed on a first-come, first-served basis upon application completion, approval by the Program Administrator, and submittal of payment to the Program Administrator for the selected credit-generating item.

6. Transfer of Credits and Refund Policy

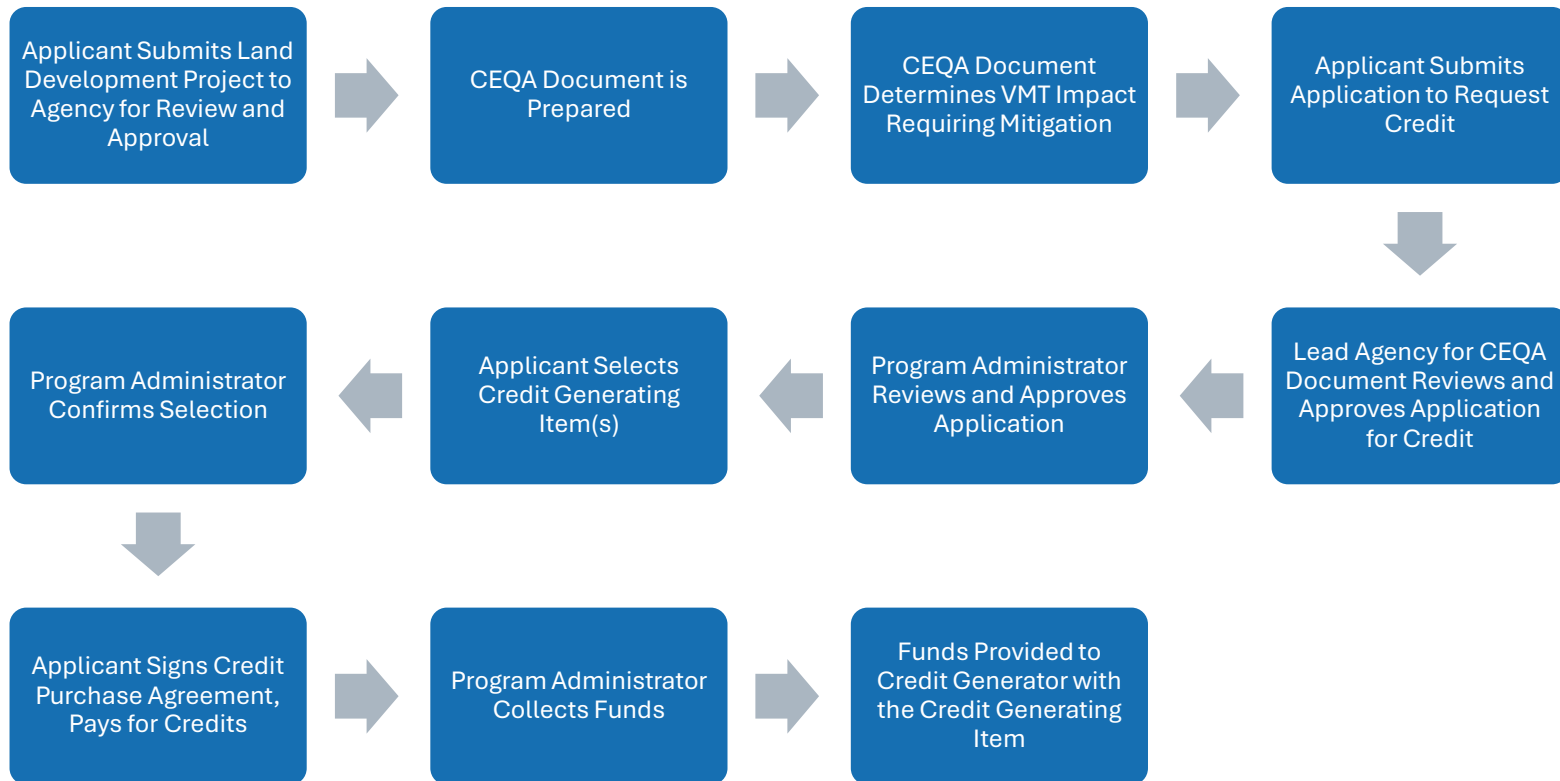
- a. A Credit User is allowed to transfer credits to another project that needs to mitigate VMT or another Credit User. The Credit User that is holding the credits must notify the Program Administrator of the transfer for purposes of maintaining an account for the credits.
- b. Credit purchases are nonrefundable.

7. Reporting

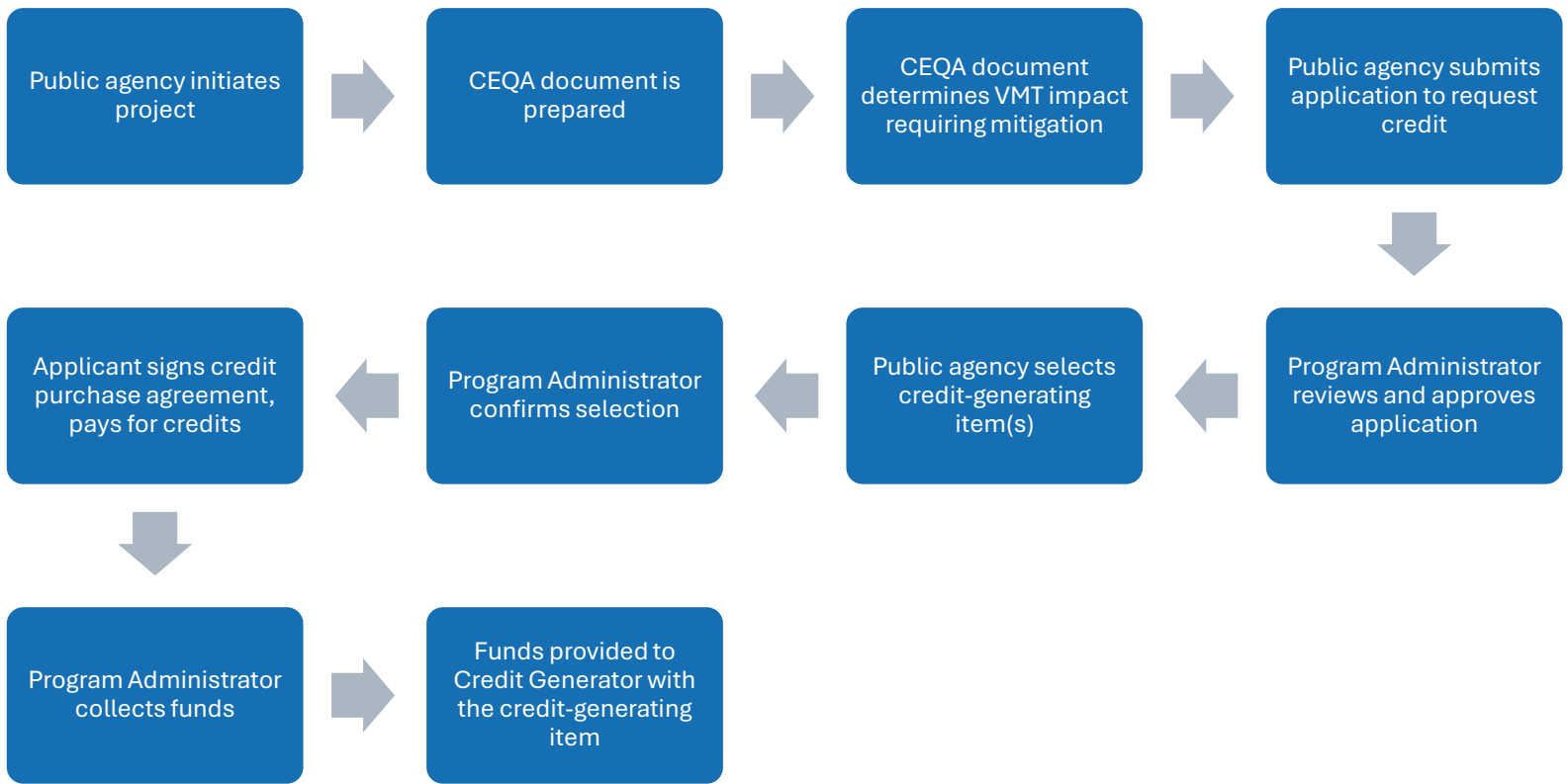
The Program Administrator will prepare an Annual Report on the Program.



WRCOG Voluntary VMT Mitigation Exchange Program
Process for Submitting Credit-Generating Items



WRCOG Voluntary VMT Mitigation Exchange Program
Process for Private Sector Requests for Credits



WRCOG Voluntary VMT Mitigation Exchange Program
Process for Public Sector Request for Credits

8. *Dispute Resolution Process and Appeals*

This section details the types of Program disputes that may arise, the procedures for resolving disputes, and the process for submitting an appeal when a dispute cannot be resolved.

a. **Types of Disputes**

(i) Credit Generation Disputes

- (1) **Quantification of Credits:** This type of issue arises when there is a dispute regarding the amount of credits assigned to a credit-generating item.
- (2) **Denial of Potential Credit-Generating Items:** This type of dispute arises when a Credit Generator has submitted a credit-generating item that the Program Administrator has determined does not meet the requirements as outlined by this Program Manual.
- (3) **Noncompletion of Credit-Generating Item:** This type of dispute arises when a proposed credit-generating item remains uncompleted.
- (4) **Cost Issues:** This type of dispute arises when there is either an alleged overstatement or understatement of the cost to complete a credit-generating item.

(ii) Governance Disputes

- (1) **Credit Allocation:** This type of dispute arises when there is a dispute regarding the availability and assignment of credits in the Program. For instance, available credits are available on a first-come, first-served basis, which may create disputes if two Credit Users desire to utilize the same credit-generating item.

b. **Procedures**

If a qualified person or entity has a Program dispute, they shall first attempt to resolve the dispute informally with Program staff. The staff of that public agency involved in the Program dispute may also participate in such discussions. If the Program dispute remains unresolved after a reasonable attempt to address it at the staff level, the qualified person or entity may submit a written appeal to the WRCOG Executive Director.

c. Appeals

(i) Standing to Appeal

No entity shall have standing to avail themselves of this section, except those entities who have opted into the Program as a Credit Generator, Implementing Agency, or a CEQA lead agency and have an unresolved, appealable issue or matter.

(ii) Appealable Issues and Matters

No issue or matter shall be heard or reviewed under this section unless the issue or matter is appealable and brought forth by an entity with standing to appeal. An issue or matter is appealable, if a qualified person or entity (Appellant) has a good-faith dispute directly related to the Program regarding the following disputes:

- Denial of potential credit-generating items (as defined above)
- Quantification of credits (as defined above)
- Credit allocation (as defined above)
- General governance disputes (as defined above)
- Administrative fee for credit-generating items purchased for Transportation Projects by the Implementing Agency (Riverside County Transportation Commission or any jurisdiction within the Western Riverside County subregion).

(iii) Appeal Process

(1) Exhaustion of Dispute Resolution Process

Before filing an appeal pursuant to this section, the Appellant must engage in the informal dispute resolution process, as outlined in Section III.D.9.b. of this Program Manual. If the Appellant does not engage in the dispute resolution process, the matter may not be presented for appeal.

(2) Executive Director Review

- (a) The Appellant shall state the basis of their appeal. Only matters raised in the appeal shall be subject to review. Any matter not raised in the appeal shall not be subject to consideration. The purpose of this limitation is to provide

adequate notice to all parties with respect to the issues on appeal and eliminate the necessity of rehearing matters not subject to challenge.

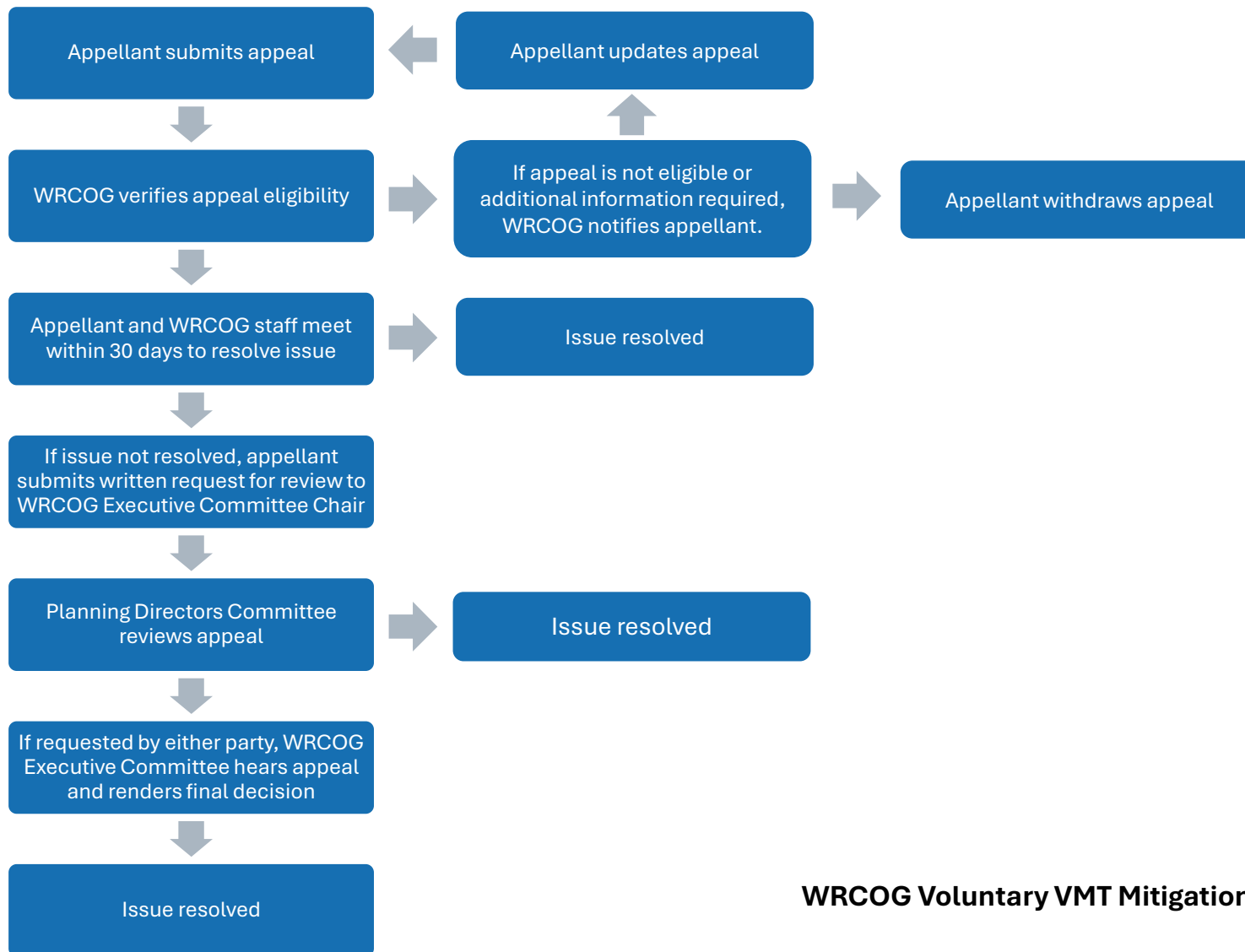
(b) The Appellant and the WRCOG Executive Director, or designee, will attempt to hold a meeting within 30 days of the WRCOG Executive Director's receipt of the appeal. The WRCOG Executive Director shall then attempt to render a written decision within 15 days of the meeting, unless otherwise notified.

(c) If the Appellant desires further review from the Program Administrator, the Appellant may submit a written request for review to the WRCOG Executive Committee chair within 90 days.

(3) Committee Review

After the written appeal is received by the WRCOG Executive Committee chair, the item shall be presented to the WRCOG Planning Directors Committee for review. At the request of either Program Administrator staff or the Appellant, the recommendation of the PDC shall be forwarded to the WRCOG Executive Committee for review and action. The Appellant shall receive written notice of the time and place of the hearing. The WRCOG Executive Committee shall review the report of the PDC regarding the appeal. At the time set for the hearing, the Appellant may request an opportunity to be heard and to present any relevant evidence supporting the appeal. After considering the evidence presented, the WRCOG Executive Committee shall render a decision that shall be final.

The appeals process is described in Exhibit 6.



WRCOG Voluntary VMT Mitigation Exchange Program
Appeals Process

9. Liability Considerations

a. Contractual Enforcement between Program Administrator and Credit Generator

To participate in the Voluntary VMT Exchange Program, Credit Generators will be required to enter into a Participation Agreement with the Program Administrator. A template of the Participation Agreement template is included as Appendix A to this Program Manual. The Participation Agreement will address, among other items, the following:

- The rights and responsibilities of Credit Generators who submit credit-generating items.
- That credit-generating items meet the criteria outlined in this Program Manual.
- Notification to remove credit-generating items if other funding sources are attained.
- The requirement that credit-generating items can only be removed with approval of the Program Administrator.
- The exclusion of credit-generating items from being used in multiple mitigation programs or mitigation for another project requiring VMT mitigation
- A means of enforcement if issues arise with credit-generating items.

b. Contractual Enforcement between Program Administrator and Credit User

- c.** To participate in the Program, Credit Users will be required to enter into a Purchase Agreement, separately, with only the Program Administrator when purchasing credits for a specific credit-generating item. A copy of the Purchase Agreement template is included in this Program Manual as Appendix B.

10. Best Practices by Program Administrator for Pending VMT Credit-Generating Items if Development Project/Transportation Project is subject to CEQA Litigation for Extended Period of Time

The Credit User for this Program assumes all risk. As is the case for any development or transportation project, there is always the possibility that protracted litigation could introduce a substantial delay in the timing between when a CEQA lead agency approves a development/transportation project and the time when the project is actually built.¹

In the event of protracted litigation delays, collaboration between the Program Administrator and the CEQA lead agency for the project approvals should occur to confirm the status of litigation resolution. Until and unless the litigation is resolved, any mitigation imposed as part of the project approval would remain binding for the lead agency. Thus, absent a supplemental process by the CEQA lead agency to amend, delete, or replace the VMT credit-generating item that was imposed as binding mitigation, the VMT credit-generating item would be treated as “belonging” to the CEQA lead agency and would be unavailable for use by another agency.

In the event that litigation results in a rescission of the development/transportation project approvals, or in the event that the CEQA lead agency rescinds the project approvals for other reasons, the credits attained by the development/transportation project in question may be transferred to another Credit User per the provisions in III.D.7.a.

¹ To be clear, the mere filing of CEQA litigation does not preclude a public agency or developer from proceeding with a project. Once the approvals are issued, those approvals are valid and can be exercised even in the face of litigation. However, proceeding in the face of litigation is done at the agency or applicant’s own risk. Thus, CEQA petitioners may choose to pursue court injunctions to affirmatively stop development from proceeding at any point during the litigation’s pendency. Similarly, an adverse ruling from a court on the merits of the case could result in the rescission of approvals or other relief that would cause any project activity to cease. Because of these risks and costs, sometimes proponent agencies and/or applicants choose not to proceed with construction of approved projects, until and unless the litigation is resolved in their favor.

11. Administrative Costs.

The Program Administrator is allowed to expend a maximum of 4 percent of funds generated for the exchange of credits from the Credit User to the Credit Generator for the credit-generating item. The maximum 4 percent of funds will be used solely to carry out the responsibilities to implement and administer the Program. Eligible expenses will include staff salaries, consultant expenses, legal fees, and agency overhead expenses needed to support the Program. Through the development of its Annual Budget, WRCOG will provide a regular update regarding program revenues and expenses.

12. Relationship to Other VMT Mitigation Programs

Agencies who elect to participate in the Voluntary VMT Mitigation Program can also elect to participate in other State, regional, and local VMT Mitigation Programs at their discretion. Additionally, participation in the Voluntary VMT Mitigation Program does not preclude a Credit Generator from operating their own program.

The only limitation related to the participation in multiple programs is that a Credit Generator may not submit the same Credit-generating item to multiple programs. Credit Generators will be asked to certify that any Credit-generating item submitted to the Voluntary VMT Mitigation Program has not been submitted to any other program.

E. Exchange Menu

Credit-generating items will be presented in a menu that will include the VMT-reducing project(s) and/or program(s), the total cost to implement, and the quantified VMT reduction potential of each. The Program Administrator will compile the menu from submitted and accepted Credit-Generating Item Forms from the agencies that opt into the program. This menu will be provided to Credit Users.

13. Non-Exhaustive List of Sample Non-Exclusive Mitigation Projects

This table illustrates how credit-generating items might be listed in the Program for purchase by Credit Users.

Sample Project	VMT Credit	Cost
Purchase of transit passes	XX VMT reduced per day per transit pass purchased	XX per transit pass
Implement bicycle lane	XX VMT reduced per day once constructed	XX (capital cost)
Implement sidewalk	XX VMT reduced per day once constructed	XX (capital cost)

14. Outreach Process to Solicit Mitigation Projects

On a regular basis, the Program Administrator will solicit projects from Credit Generators to serve as credit-generating items. The Program Administrator will determine which category in Section III.B the item will fall into. Once approved, the Credit-Generating Item will be added to the Exchange Menu.

15. Ongoing Review of Mitigation Projects

To ensure credit-generating items are still active and eligible for generating credit, the VMT Program Administrator will periodically review the projects included in the Exchange Menu and may request updates from Credit Generators.

As part of this review, the Program Administrator shall request updated cost estimates for any credit-generating item from the Credit Generators on at least an annual basis. Credit generators may also provide updated cost information to the Program Administrator for the specific credit-generating item more frequently at their discretion.

F. Participants

The following agencies make up an initial list of Credit Generators eligible to opt in to the Program. Once a Credit Generator has opted in, they are eligible to opt out at any time, provided they follow the protocol set forth in this Program Manual.

- Riverside Transit Agency (RTA)
- Riverside County Transportation Commission (RCTC)
- Western Riverside County Regional Conservation Authority (RCA)
- County of Riverside
- City of Banning
- City of Beaumont
- City of Calimesa
- City of Canyon Lake
- City of Corona

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- City of Eastvale
 - City of Hemet
 - City of Jurupa Valley
 - City of Lake Elsinore
 - City of Menifee
 - City of Moreno Valley
 - City of Murrieta
 - City of Norco
 - City of Perris
 - City of Riverside
 - City of San Jacinto
 - City of Temecula
 - City of Wildomar

IV. QUALIFICATION CRITERIA FOR CREDIT-GENERATING ITEMS

Following are the criteria for approval of credit-generating items:

1. The Credit Generator has a Participation Agreement on file with the Program Administrator;
2. The proposed credit-generating item has provided a cost estimate to construct or implement the credit-generating item and enough clear, consistent, and transparent information to quantify VMT reduction potential. Information needed to quantify VMT reduction potential will vary by credit-generating item. The quantification of VMT credits generated on the proposed credit-generating item will be calculated by a technical expert provided by the Program Administrator. Refer to Appendix C for details on what information is required.

V. QUANTIFICATION OF CREDIT-GENERATING ITEMS

A. General Principles for Credit Quantification

Quantification of potential VMT reduction of credit-generating items should be based on the best available data and resources. Quantification should be clearly and consistently documented with all sources cited.

Credit-generating items with quantified VMT reduction in the latest version of the *Handbook for Analyzing Greenhouse Gas Emission Reductions, Assessing Climate Vulnerabilities, and Advancing Health and Equity* (GHG Handbook) (CAPCOA 2024) would be utilized as the basis for the quantification of many of the anticipated credit-generating items. This would include mitigation projects, such as constructing a bike lane or introducing a new transit line. In the future, if a more robust or up-to-date technical resource is available and accepted as the industry standard for VMT reduction quantification, this should be referenced for credit quantification.

More innovative or programmatic strategies that are not quantified in the GHG Handbook would require a customized approach based on the credit-generating item. Customized calculations using alternative data sources, like the Riverside County Transportation Model (RIVCOM), or tracking/surveying participants would be used to

determine how much VMT would be reduced. Innovative or programmatic strategies subject to customized calculations would include mitigation projects or programs, such as The Nature Conservancy partnerships or a land exchange.

All quantification will be prepared and reviewed by a qualified technical expert with relevant experience through the Program Administrator.

B. Standardized Calculation Methods

Each credit-generating item may utilize a different methodology depending on whether the GHG Handbook is the appropriate resource or if a customized approach is required. A quantification form(s) to quantify the number of credits an item generated will be provided with the intent for calculations to be standardized.

VI. APPENDICES

APPENDIX A.

Template agreement to participate in the Program, for Credit Generators to provide credit-generating items to the Program, and for the Program Administrator to administer the Program.).

APPENDIX B.

Template agreement between a Credit User and the Program Administrator to purchase credits for a specific project/program.

APPENDIX C.

Calculation worksheets for submission of a credit-generating item.