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On August 6, 2014, the Governor's Office of Planning and Research released a [preliminary discussion draft](#) of changes to the CEQA Guidelines that will change the way that transportation impacts are analyzed under CEQA. Since the release of the draft, OPR staff has conducted extensive outreach on the proposal. That outreach included, among other things:

- Participation in statewide conferences for local governments, planners, environmental professionals, and attorneys
- Presentations to local chapters of the Association of Environmental Professionals and American Planning Association
- A webcast public workshop
- Multidisciplinary regional convenings conducted in several California locations
- A webinar
- One-on-one conversations with interested stakeholders

OPR sought input on the draft over an extended comment period, ending on November 21, 2014. The comments that OPR received demonstrate an active interest, and in many cases, a sophisticated understanding of the complex issues involved in this update. OPR thanks all of those who contributed their expertise and insight in this effort.

Having reviewed all of the written comments submitted during the comment period (available [here](#)), and participated in the outreach described above, OPR is now developing a revised draft which will be released for additional public review in the near term. The following briefly summarizes the major themes that emerged in the input that OPR received.

Comments Supporting the Proposal

Many comments were submitted in support of the proposal to replace level of service as a measure of environmental impact with vehicle miles traveled. Support came from a variety of sectors, including local governments, transportation agencies, metropolitan planning organizations, developers and individuals. Reasons for support included, among others:

- The shift removes a serious impediment to infill development, transit and active transportation projects.
- The shift advances local, regional and statewide climate goals, consistent with SB 375.
- The proposal maintains flexibility for local governments and strengthens local control over transportation planning.

Comments Raising Concerns

Multiple sectors also raised broad concerns about the proposal, including:

- The public may view traffic congestion as a quality of life issue, even if it is not considered an environmental issue under CEQA. Some comments noted that level of service requirements are already embedded in general plans and local fee programs.
- Other comments suggested that the public is not familiar with vehicle miles traveled as a measure of impact.
- Some comments suggested that changes in CEQA analysis may become an issue in future litigation, and that the proposal should reduce litigation risk to the extent possible.

Comments about Models and Data Availability

Some comments reveal a sophisticated level of understanding of the different tools and data available to estimate vehicle miles traveled from new development. Those comments raised questions addressing, among other things:

- Which models (i.e., sketch models, regional travel demand models, etc.) should be used for which types of projects?
- What are the best sources of trip length data for various land use types?
- What is the potential role for the California Statewide Travel Demand Model? Or for the metropolitan planning organization models?

Comments Related to Thresholds of Significance

Senate Bill 743 did not direct OPR to develop thresholds of significance, though it did require the proposed guidelines to give direction regarding the determination of significance. As a placeholder, the preliminary discussion draft suggested “regional average” vehicle miles traveled as a potential threshold. Comments raised competing concerns. For example:

- Some suggested that regional average would be too difficult a threshold for suburbs and rural areas.
- Others suggested that regional average would be too lenient for urban areas.
- Still other comments recommended that any recommended thresholds should be tied to SB 375 targets and California’s long-term climate goals.

Comments Related to Transportation Projects

Several comments focused in on the evaluation of transportation projects:

- Several transit agencies expressed support for the proposal, noting that level of service has tended to penalize transit and active transportation projects.
- Some comments asked for additional detail regarding the analysis of induced travel, specifically regarding projects involving intersection and local street improvements (i.e., turn pockets, etc.).
- Even though there was no real disagreement that highway infrastructure may create environmental impacts, some transportation agencies expressed concern about the effect of new analysis on project delivery.

Comments Related to Safety

Comments raised various perspectives on safety:

- Some sectors appreciated that the proposal raised the profile of pedestrian and bicyclist safety.
- Other comments indicated that the analysis of safety requires nuance, and is not particularly well-suited for a CEQA analysis.
- Still others raised concerns that a safety analysis may inappropriately focus on congestion, and thereby create the same problems caused by level of service analyses.

Comments Related to Mitigation

Several comments focused on mitigation of vehicle miles traveled:

- Some comments praised the shift to vehicle miles traveled because mitigation would focus on changes to the project, instead of changes to the surrounding environment (i.e., additional roadway infrastructure).
- Some expressed concern, however, that the list of example mitigation measures proposed might be misconstrued as mandatory for all projects.
- Some comments suggested that the list of examples was too focused on urban conditions.
- Other comments asked how best to quantify the reduction in vehicle miles traveled that may result from the listed measures.

Comments Related to Timing

Many comments addressed the timing of implementation:

- Some communities expressed a desire to move ahead immediately with the shift to vehicle miles travel.
- Many other comments, however, indicated that stakeholders would benefit from additional time to adjust to the change.

Next Steps

As indicated above, OPR is developing a revised draft for further review and comment. Notice of all future CEQA Guidelines activity will be distributed through the [CEQA Guidelines listserv](#).