

April 2019

Volume 13, Issue 1

## Inside this issue:

GHG Thresholds of Significance Update	1
Transitioning Construction Mitigation	1
Mayor's Commission on Climate Change	2
Greening the Fleet Training for Local Agencies and Developers	2
City of Elk Grove 1st in Region to Tackle Senate Bill 743	3
Friant Ranch Decision connects Project Emissions to Health	4

## Contact Us:

**Sac Metro Air District**  
 Transportation and  
 Climate Change Section  
 777 12th Street, 3rd Floor  
 Sacramento, CA 95814

**Paul Philley**  
 916-874-4882  
[pphilley@airquality.org](mailto:pphilley@airquality.org)

[www.airquality.org](http://www.airquality.org)

Editor: JJ Hurley

## GHG Thresholds of Significance Update

On January 9, 2019, Sac Metro Air District staff hosted a workshop to present draft updates to its greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) thresholds of significance and to receive feedback from interested attendees. The draft thresholds include a 3,500 metric ton/year screening level and efficiency metrics for the years 2020 and 2036 for projects exceeding the screening level. Staff developed the efficiency metrics using data from the Sacramento Area Council of Governments' (SACOG) Metropolitan Transportation Plan/Sustainable Communities Strategy adopted in 2016. Using emissions data from environmental documents received between 2014-2017, staff calculated the screening level by expanding the California Air Pollution Control Officers Association concept used for the original thresholds of capturing 90 percent of emissions from new proposed projects to a 98 percent capture rate.

Attendees provided valuable feedback and asked pertinent questions related to contemporary court cases. As a result, staff will be taking additional time to analyze and possibly expand the data sets to ensure the thresholds update will have the substantial evidence needed for the Sac Metro Air District Board of Directors' consideration.

Stay apprised of the GHG thresholds update by subscribing to the Sac Metro Air District's Land Use and Transportation email list: <http://www.airquality.org/Air-Quality-Health/Public-Outreach/>

## Transitioning Construction Mitigation

As reported in the July 2018 issue of the LUTRANews, Sac Metro Air District staff sought input on draft recommended construction mitigation language from stakeholders. The goals of updating the mitigation language were to acknowledge that the State of California regulates off-road construction equipment, reducing the state fleet average emissions, and to reduce unnecessary paperwork. Sac Metro Air District received constructive criticism from lead agencies, construction companies and developer representatives with each draft proposal. This back and forth ultimately led to practical language that will mitigate construction emissions from proposed projects in Sacramento County and its cities.

To summarize, the updated mitigation language includes both onsite and offsite mitigation. The onsite mitigation requires the off-road construction fleet demonstrate a 10% NOX reduction compared to the state fleet average, with an initial and final equipment submittal to document compliance. The onsite mitigation sunsets on January 1, 2028, which is the expected full implementation date of the State of California's off-road regulation. Additionally, the offsite mitigation identifies mitigation fees, timing of payment, and provides the opportunity for the project proponent to recalculate the fees prior to construction. The update recommended language is available in chapter 3 of the Sac Metro Air District's Guide to Air Quality Assessment in Sacramento County, which is accessible at [www.airquality.org](http://www.airquality.org).

Sac Metro Air District requests lead agencies begin using the new mitigation language in environmental documents starting May 1, 2019. Contact Karen Huss at 916-874-4881 or [khuss@airquality.org](mailto:khuss@airquality.org) if you have questions on the updated mitigation language.

## Climate Planning Can Improve Health and Air Quality

Teri Duarte and Shelley Jiang

What if we told you that we can make some of our biggest improvements for health and air quality by cutting carbon and other greenhouse gases? As we've burned fossil fuels to facilitate economic growth, technological advancement and our current way of life, we became a car-centric [culture](#). In so doing, we have lost the health benefits of regular walking and physical activity in daily living, which has led to the spread of obesity and diseases such as diabetes, heart disease, [and cancer](#). [With](#) hotter, colder, wetter, drier and ever-stormier conditions heading our way, a population that struggles with chronic diseases will face additional challenges of asthma, heat stress, heart attacks, and the stress and trauma of catastrophic events. This takes a toll on our residents – especially our low-income and environmental justice communities – our economic resilience and prosperity, and our health care system. Climate change is the world's greatest challenge. It threatens every aspect of modern life, including our physical and emotional well-being along with severe stress on our health care systems. But changes in the built environment and transportation systems offer exciting and efficient ways to improve health even as we reduce carbon emissions.

*Recognizing the urgency of taking meaningful climate action*, Sacramento Mayor Darrell Steinberg and West Sacramento Mayor Christopher Cabaldon are leading [the Mayors' Commission on Climate Change](#) to develop a vision and strategies for both cities to achieve net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2045.

As part of the Commission, working groups are developing recommendations to prioritize greenhouse gas reduction strategies for Subgroups will dive deep into the three key sector – the built environment, mobility, and community health and resilience – and create recommendations to take to the full Commission for consideration the built environment and mobility sectors; and to protect community health and resilience. The Built Environment Technical Advisory Committee was the first working group to meet. This mix of planners, architects, landscape designers, community outreach experts, and advocates met three times in early 2019 to talk about how our buildings, streets, neighborhoods, trees and plants can help meet a carbon neutrality goal by 2045.. They focused on answering these questions - "What is the vision for our two cities in 2045 – what will carbon neutrality look like?" and "What are the milestones and strategies to get us there?"

While the committee is considering many tactics, it has identified three strategies with the best possibility for improving public health:

### **Increase investment in existing communities**

The idea is simple: focus inside existing city limits for development and redevelopment. Within this key strategy, the committee recommended to:

- ◆ *Enforce an urban growth boundary*
- ◆ *Modify single-family zoning to allow more residential density*
- ◆ *Increase taxes and fees on vacant land within city limits to encourage property owners not to let land with a potential for infill development remain unused*

The committee also recommended *constructing 75,000 new housing units*, especially lower-cost housing, *within a half mile of light rail stations*. New housing near transit would not only encourage people to use transit, but it would also provide linkages to jobs, food, and health services, [especially](#) for the one-third of adults who do not drive.

These tactics would encourage more development in existing communities and enable more people to live closer to daily destinations, making it practical to walk and bike instead of drive. The resulting replacement of sedentary vehicle trips with physical movement would lead to many improvements in chronic health issues and mental well-being.

### **Electrify the transportation system**

Second, support electrification of the transportation system and improve access by *accelerating the placement of electric vehicle charging infrastructure in new commercial and multifamily buildings*. Electric vehicles are a cornerstone of California's climate strategy, and with programs like [Our Community Car Share](#) – the nation's first all-electric car-share program free for low-income communities – and [the Green City Initiative](#), our region is leading the way in pioneering new strategies. Unlike traditional cars, EVs have zero emissions so they don't produce ozone and particulate matter emissions that make breathing difficult, cause long-term respiratory illnesses and trigger early deaths. EVs even help mitigate the urban heat island effect of our changing climate.

### **Free May 9, 2019 Training: Greening the Fleet – Carbon and NOx Reductions Have Value for Local Agencies and Developers :**

The Sacramento Clean Cities Coalition, in partnership with the Sac Metro Air District, is hosting a half-day training session that will cover:

Cost-effective Climate Action Plans and Mitigation Measures when fleets reduce emissions;

Using available tools to quantify and develop fleet emission plans;

Using quantified reductions for successful grant applications. Join us on Thursday, May 9 from 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. at the California Automobile Museum, 2200 Front Street, Sacramento. Lunch will be hosted by the Sacramento Clean Cities Coalition and the Sac Metro Air District. The program is free, but registration is required: <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/funding-greening-the-fleet-carbon-reductions-have-value-tickets-59109433908?aff=affiliate1>

## Climate Planning Can Improve Health and Air Quality

*Continued from page 1*

### Urban greening

Third, planting trees and vegetation improves public health, builds community resilience, and reduces carbon emissions. Moreover, planting trees and vegetation is a community investment that will only grow in effectiveness and value over time. The Built Environment Committee specifically recommended to:

- ◆ *Plant 200,000 trees in Sacramento and West Sacramento's disadvantaged communities*
- ◆ *Place thick vegetative barriers along freeway edges*
- ◆ *Restore natural areas*

A healthy urban forest reduces ozone formation and captures particulate matter. People who live under a tree canopy report better overall health. Trees reduce ambient air temperature, provide shade for pedestrians and cyclists, lower energy use bills for homes and buildings, beautify neighborhoods, and add property value. Trees and shrubs, when planted along freeways and other busy roads, protect people from toxic air contaminants generated by traffic. By restoring natural areas with native trees and shrubs, we would not only enhance carbon sequestration, but also increase parkland for exercise and mental health, support native species, recharge groundwater, and build flood resilience.

This is an exciting set of draft recommendations. When these and the other recommendations of the Built Environment Committee are up for consideration by our Climate Commissioners, the strategies with health co-benefits should be given priority. Not only will they deliver the most for our money, but we'll get the health and resiliency benefits *before* the benefits of the GHG emissions reductions.

As a growing body of [research](#) shows, [sustained physical activity](#) is a critical factor to the health and longevity of communities in the world's "blue zones" – places like Sardinia, Okinawa, and Costa Rica where people reach centenarian ages without major illnesses. Through urban planning and mobility designs that encourage everyday movement, we have an opportunity to embed exercise as part of daily life – making it simpler and more accessible than a trip to the gym – while reducing carbon emissions and building healthy, resilient communities.

## City of Elk Grove – 1<sup>st</sup> in Sacramento Region to Tackle Senate Bill 743

Every city and county in California must have a General Plan to guide growth within its current political boundary and new growth boundary, if applicable. As cities and counties face the challenges of implementing new state mandates, the Sacramento Metropolitan Air Quality Management District would like to highlight the city of Elk Grove (city) for being the first jurisdiction in the Sacramento region to tackle Senate Bill 743 (Steinberg, 2013) (SB 743) by incorporating its legislative requirements into the city's General Plan. The city's experiences may help to inform the future efforts of other cities and counties.

### What is SB 743?

When Governor Brown signed SB 743, it changed the way transportation impacts must be analyzed under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). SB 743 shifted the analysis of transportation impacts on the environment from the existing standards of vehicle delay (measured as Level of Service or LOS) to a more balanced approach by incorporating a Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT) metric. Because VMT is directly linked to greenhouse gas emissions and air pollutants regulated by the Federal Clean Air Act (commonly referred to as "criteria" air pollutants), the VMT metric is a more direct measurement of a project's air quality impacts. Under SB 743, a project's effect on vehicle delay is no longer considered a significant impact under CEQA.

### Elk Grove's Approach to SB 743 Compliance

The City's approach to SB 743 compliance was to integrate Roadway Efficiency policies and VMT policies into their General Plan update. By creating the Roadway Efficiency policies, the city recognized the need to retain policies similar to the LOS standards in order to guide roadway sizing and efficiency, so that traffic congestion can be addressed through local policies – outside of the CEQA review process. Additionally, bicycle and pedestrian stress scores are used to incorporate safety

VMT vs. LOS Definitions	
<p>VMT, or Vehicle Miles Traveled, is defined as the total number of vehicle miles traveled resulting from a development project due to the project's land use and its physical relationship to other land uses.</p>	<p>LOS, or Level of Service, is a measure of the quality of vehicle traffic service. It categorizes traffic flow, on roadways and at intersections, using performance measures like vehicle speed, density, congestion, etc.</p>
Metric for Analyzing a Project's Transportation Impacts on the Environment	
<p><b>Why use VMT?</b> Using VMT as a metric allows the analysis to include a regional transportation impact by loading the full extent of a project's VMT onto the roadway network. With the VMT metric, pedestrian, bicycle, transit improvements are assumed to reduce VMT unless shown otherwise. The VMT metric is a more direct measurement of environmental impacts from criteria air pollutants and greenhouse gas emissions.</p>	<p><b>Why not use LOS?</b> Using LOS as a metric does not account for regional transportation impacts caused by the project. LOS penalizes "last-in" projects, and infill projects, which are generally associated with lower criteria air pollutants and greenhouse gas emissions. LOS is biased against pedestrian, bicycle and transit improvement projects.</p>

## City of Elk Grove – 1<sup>st</sup> in Sacramento Region to Tackle Senate Bill 743

*Continued from page 3*

into the roadway design. On the other hand, the city's VMT policies provide a local process for complying with state VMT reduction targets using local VMT limits; the VMT policies also provide a process for the Elk Grove City Council to approve a non-conforming project through overriding considerations.

The primary elements of the city's VMT policies and evaluation process are as follows:

**Preferred Metric:** The city chose VMT per service population by land use designation as their preferred metric. The city's Transportation Analysis Guidelines define service population as the sum of total dwelling units and employees working within the assessed area.

**Performance Targets:**

For land use projects, the city chose to set VMT limits by land use designation as the primary control. They also set citywide and new growth area VMT limits as the secondary control. The citywide VMT limits are contained to the city's current political boundary and the new growth area VMT limits apply to their anticipated new growth boundary.

- Each performance target has a 15 percent reduction from the current VMT performance of similar land uses. For example, the city's performance target for a project designated as a Community Commercial land use would have a VMT limit of 69.2 daily VMT per service population, which is a 15 percent reduction from the current VMT performance of similar land uses within the city.
- For transportation projects, the city set short-term and long-term VMT thresholds.
- Short-term thresholds: VMT must not exceed the transportation project's baseline.
- Long-term thresholds: Transportation project must be consistent with regional transportation plans.

**General Plan Policies:** The city established policies in its General Plan that require land use and transportation projects to comply with the VMT metric and VMT limits. By doing so, it established the VMT metric and VMT limits as thresholds of significance for CEQA.

**Review Process:** The actual VMT limits and VMT review process are contained in the city's Transportation Analysis Guidelines – a separate document from the city's General Plan. The VMT review process will ensure compliance with the General Plan policies and VMT thresholds. The VMT review process also includes a screening tool, mitigation measures and a process for overriding considerations.

- The city created a map to screen out areas that are anticipated to have VMT below the performance targets to streamline the review process.
- Mitigation measures, such as an in lieu fee, are available to help a project comply with the VMT performance targets.
- And finally, the city council may proceed with a project that doesn't conform to the VMT thresholds, even after the mitigation measures have been applied, by way of overriding considerations. The city could require the project to include community benefit measures.

In summary, the city developed and integrated Roadway Efficiency policies and VMT policies into their General Plan in order to balance the city's need for congestion management with statewide VMT goals and mandates. The city council adopted the Transportation Analysis Guidelines along with the General Plan update, Climate Action Plan update and General Plan Final Environmental Impact Report on February 27, 2019. To learn more about the city's policy documents, visit its General Plan update website ([http://www.elkgrovecity.org/city\\_hall/departments\\_divisions/planning/a\\_brighter\\_future](http://www.elkgrovecity.org/city_hall/departments_divisions/planning/a_brighter_future)).

### Friant Ranch Decision Seeks to Connect Project Emissions Directly to Health

The California Supreme Court decision in *Sierra Club v. County of Fresno (2018) 6 Cal. 5th 502* created a new challenge for lead agencies, environmental consultants, and air districts. The court determined that Fresno County, as lead agency, did not correlate the health impacts expected from the proposed Friant Ranch Specific Plan project's emissions, or disclose the impacts in the environmental document. The court directed the lead agency to either include the analysis, or disclose in detail in the environmental document the reasoning why the analysis was not feasible.

Sac Metro Air District staff are in the process of developing recommendations to assist lead agencies with this challenge. Contact Paul Philley at 916-874-4882 or [pphilley@airquality.org](mailto:pphilley@airquality.org) for more information.