



® February 29, 2016

1100 K Street  
Suite 101  
Sacramento  
California  
95814

Telephone  
916.327.7500

Facsimile  
916.441.5507

Ken Alex  
Director, Governor's Office of Planning and Research  
1400 Tenth Street  
Sacramento, CA 95814

**RE: Revised Proposal on Updates to the CEQA Guidelines on Evaluating  
Transportation Impacts in CEQA**

Dear Mr. Alex:

The California State Association of Counties (CSAC) appreciates the opportunity to comment on the Revised Proposal on Updates to the CEQA Guidelines on Evaluating Transportation Impacts in CEQA. While CSAC continues to have concerns about the proposal to require this replacement metric for the analysis of transportation impacts of projects and plans statewide, we appreciate the two-year timeframe for requiring full implementation following the adoption of the regulations. Moreover, we appreciate that the revised draft incorporates within its technical appendix some well-warranted changes that will help smooth the implementation of the proposed changes in all types of communities in California, especially those located in very rural areas. Our general concern regarding the applicability of the new metric in those rural communities stems from the fact that there may be very few options, if any, for mitigating VMT for certain types of projects. We hope that OPR will carefully analyze this issue in collaboration with its local partners and that any necessary revisions to the guidelines will be made if problems are encountered as implementation proceeds.

While it is beyond the scope of OPR's request for comments on the particular elements of the revised proposal, CSAC would like to stress the need for state's resources to be brought to bear as communities across the state prepare to implement this significant change to the analysis of transportation impacts under CEQA. We appreciate the efforts your staff and Caltrans have already engaged in to make data useful for the analysis of VMT more easily available online, but additional technical assistance and funding will be necessary as local agencies change their practices for reviewing the transportation impacts under the pending updates to the CEQA guidelines included in the revised proposal.

### ***Two-Year Timeline for Implementation***

CSAC strongly supports the inclusion of a two-year period following the adoption of the regulations during which lead agencies can, at their discretion, decide whether or not to implement the proposed changes. CSAC hopes that resources can be allocated during that two-year time period to pilot the new CEQA guidelines in suburban and rural jurisdictions that might not otherwise implement the change immediately. Moreover, technical assistance and funding will be broadly necessary during this interim period as agencies update their practices to prepare to analyze the transportation impacts of projects, including the adoption of land use or transportation plans, using VMT rather than Level of Service.

### ***Recommended Numeric Thresholds for Residential Projects***

The technical appendix recommends that residential projects in the unincorporated area with estimated VMT that exceeds 85% of VMT per capita in the aggregate of all incorporated cities in the county and exceeds 85% of the regional VMT per capita may have a significant

transportation impact. On the other hand, the appendix recommends that residential projects within the incorporated area with VMT exceeding the citywide average and VMT exceeding the regional average may have a significant transportation impact. Based on comments made by OPR staff during a webinar on this topic, CSAC understands that the purpose of the inclusion of the citywide average recommended threshold was to encourage projects in the most transportation-efficient areas of incorporated cities. To provide parity between cities and counties, CSAC suggests that the recommended threshold in the unincorporated area be based upon the 85% below the VMT per capita of the unincorporated area and 85% below the regional per capita VMT.

### ***Screening Threshold for Small Projects***

CSAC appreciates the inclusion of OPR's recommendation that projects that generate few trips will also generally generate few vehicle miles traveled; specifically, the recommendation that projects that generate fewer than 100 trips per day may generally be assumed to cause a less than significant transportation impact.

### ***Rural Projects Outside MPOs***

CSAC strongly supports the inclusion of OPR's recommendation in the technical appendix that rural areas of non-Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) counties may best determine thresholds of significance for transportation impacts on a case-by-case basis. We appreciate, and agree with, OPR's comment that fewer options are likely available for reducing VMT in these community types.

CSAC is concerned that similar conditions, including the lack of feasible mitigation measures for reducing VMT, exist in the very rural areas of some MPOs. The technical appendix should reflect consideration for the existence of these rural community types in MPOs, including the potential need to determine the threshold of significance for transportation impacts from projects located therein, on a similar case-by-case basis as in rural areas outside of MPOs.

### ***Recommendations for Considering Transportation Project VMT Effects***

CSAC appreciates the revised proposal's approach to defining which transportation projects would not be considered to have significant impacts. Specifically, we support the inclusion in the technical appendix of the list of potential transportation project types, many of which are very common on local streets and roads, which are generally assumed not to lead to a substantial or measurable increase in VMT, and which therefore do not require analysis.

### ***Recommended Significance Thresholds for Transportation Projects***

CSAC is concerned by the inclusion of a recommended numeric threshold for VMT from transportation projects, aside from those assumed to have no substantial or measurable increase in VMT, which is based on a "fair share" of additional VMT calculated on a statewide per-project basis. While the technical appendix recommendations indicate that lead agencies with more complete or specific data may use it to calculate the "fair share," we are concerned that the recommended measure is too rough to be useful. At the very least, the inclusion of an efficiency measure for each project's VMT share (for instance, per new lane mile) should be considered. On the other hand, the inclusion of the numerical threshold recommendation in the technical appendix seems redundant given SB 375's requirement for regional transportation plans that require reductions in VMT. Transportation projects included in a Sustainable Communities Strategy, or an equivalent plan outside of an MPO, should be presumed to have a less than significant impact on VMT.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit these comments. For more information on our position, please do not hesitate contact me at 916.650.8185 or [kvalentine@counties.org](mailto:kvalentine@counties.org).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Kiana G. Valentine". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Kiana Valentine  
Legislative Representative