DRISI

CALTRANS DIVISION OF RESEARCH, INNOVATION AND SYSTEM INFORMATION

Research Notes

The Role of Level of Service in Post-SB 743 California

Planning, Policy & Programming

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Project Title:
The Role of Level of Service in Post-SB 743 California

Task Number: 3372

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WHAT IS THE NEED?

California's Senate Bill (SB) 743, adopted in 2013, eliminated the traditionally-used metric of Level of Service (LOS) under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and other roadway processes, which aimed to eliminate traffic delay, resulting in greater roadway capacity and increased vehicle miles traveled. State implementing guidelines for SB 743, adopted in 2018, instead require assessment of impacts of development projects and plans upon vehicle miles traveled (VMT). Still, many localities still have LOS goals and the public still sees traffic congestion as one of the most important transportation issues. More information is needed on the ways that LOS and VMT interact in local policy.

WHAT ARE WE DOING?

The research team will initiate this project with a review of literature on CEQA, LOS, impact fees, and other pertinent topics. Next, the research team will review public documents and conduct interviews to determine how California cities are integrating VMT- and LOS-related metrics in their conditions for development approval and/or impact fee structures. City policies will be the primary focus for this research project because city governments are the primary lead agencies for CEQA review of development projects in California.

WHAT IS OUR GOAL?

The goal of this research is to address the following questions:

- What methods (metrics, standards for approval, measurement tools) do the study cities use for review of transportation impacts of development projects, both under CEQA and "off-CEQA"?
- For what reasons and specific purposes does the city want to continue to employ LOS analysis? What are the

consequences of discontinuing use of LOS?
- What challenges, if any, have arisen in integrating application of both LOS and VMT standards in project review, and how has this city addressed them?
- How will the new VMT metrics, and integrating them with LOS goals and standards, affect costs of project- and plan-level environmental review in the city?
- What changes, if any, are needed to improve LOS and VMT integration, and why?
- Has or will this city revise its General Plan and/or associated plans such as a Climate Action Plan to address VMT reduction goals, pursuant to SB 743? How and why?
- Does the city include LOS standards in the General Plan?

WHAT IS THE BENEFIT?

This research will result in a better understanding of the value of the LOS metric for California cities. This research will be particularly beneficial in determining various potential utilizations of the large body of data and research related to LOS that has been collected and documented over the past decades.

The report will present and discuss findings that address the research questions related to a city's intentions and perceptions of opportunities and challenges of integrating LOS- and VMT-related metrics and standards in a fashion that supports attainment of SB 743 and broader sustainability goals and objectives, when applying conditions of development approval, structuring impact fee requirements, and otherwise attaining related city-level policy goals. Special attention will be paid to how integrating LOS and VMT will affect the costs of development project approval and affordable housing provision.

WHAT IS THE PROGRESS TO DATE?

The literature review is complete and the research team has drafted a survey for city planning directors, and conducted case study research on the six central cities.

IMAGES

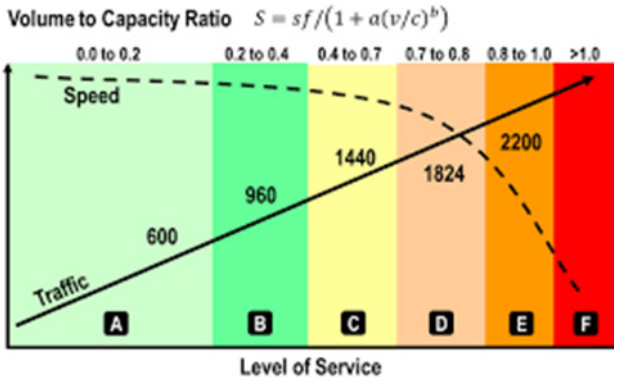

Image 1: Level of Service ratings for a sample roadway and sample daily traffic.