

**Planning/Policy/
Programming****May 2026****Project Title:** Exploring Induced Travel from Rail Transit Expansions**Task Number:** 4711**Start Date:** November 1, 2025**Completion Date:** December 31, 2026**Task Manager:**Kevin Spiker
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DRISI provides solutions and knowledge that improves California's transportation system.

Exploring Induced Travel from Rail Transit Expansions

This project will examine how transportation and land-use projects, especially expansions of commuter and regional rail, influence vehicle miles traveled (VMT) and how those impacts can be better estimated and reduced. Because the effects of added transit service on both transit ridership and driving are not well understood, the project will review existing research, analyze available California data, and study at least one real-world case. The findings will lead to recommendations for evaluating VMT impacts in environmental reviews and will support Caltrans, the Air Resources Board, and other decisionmakers as they develop policies and tools to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and promote more sustainable transportation choices.

WHAT IS THE NEED?

This research project will take an in depth look at estimating and mitigating vehicle miles traveled (VMT) induced by both transportation and land development projects which is essential to meeting California's greenhouse gas emissions targets, as well as informing decisionmakers and the public about project-level effects in cost-benefit analyses and environmental review. The VMT effects of transit service provision or expansion can be particularly tricky to estimate. Not much is known about the effects of commuter/regional rail on either regional transit use or regional automobile use.

WHAT ARE WE DOING?

In this project, we will start by reviewing existing research to understand what is already known about how expanding rail transit affects both transit ridership and driving. Next, we will look at the data available in California to see what can actually be used to measure how commuter and regional rail expansions influence car use and transit use in the real world. Finally, based on what we learn, we will develop practical recommendations for how to evaluate the VMT impacts of new rail projects during environmental review—or identify what additional data or research is needed to make those evaluations reliable.

WHAT IS OUR GOAL?

The findings from this project can benefit Caltrans as it develops its vehicle miles traveled (VMT) mitigation policy in partnership with the California Air Resources Board as it sets greenhouse gas emission reduction targets and reviews sustainable communities' strategies.

WHAT IS THE BENEFIT?

This project would help fill that gap by empirically examining the effect of increased commuter/ regional rail on transit use and automobile use, using at least one California case study. The project would also produce a synthesis of the literature on the effect of rail transit expansion on both transit and automobile use, as well as recommendations for assessing the VMT effects of expanding rail transit in environmental reviews. The project results could help inform the VMT mitigation playbook Caltrans is developing for its VMT-induced projects. It will help Caltrans, other transportation agencies, lawmakers, and the public more effectively prioritize environmentally sustainable transportation options.

WHAT IS THE PROGRESS TO DATE?

Held a kickoff meeting with Caltrans in early 2026. Since then, have officially hired a GSR and have been working primarily on our main research task - reviewing the literature on the effects of rail transit expansions or other improvements on VMT and related travel behaviors. We have also outlined our approach to surveying the data available for empirically examining those effects.

IMAGES



Image 1: Passengers board a Metro Rapid Bus on Vermont Avenue in South Los Angeles. (Al Seib / Los Angeles Times)