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## **Building Planning Capacity for Reducing Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT)**

VMT measures the distance that vehicles travel. Encouraging walkable communities with more transportation options reduces VMT. Reducing VMT also helps to avoid expensive road expansions, traffic, air pollution, and loss of natural and working lands.

### **Goals:**

To meet California's carbon neutrality goal by 2045, the California Air Resources Board (CARB) 2022 [Scoping Plan](#) targets reducing VMT per capita from 24.6 miles per day in 2019 to 18.4 miles by 2030 (a 25 percent reduction) and to 17.2 miles per day by 2045 (a 30 percent reduction). This translates to every Californian reducing how often or how far they are driving by about 7 miles per day in 2045. The goal of reducing VMT is to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, air pollution, traffic associated with vehicle traveled, and encourage walkable communities with less traffic and more transportation options to destinations. To help support this goal there is a need to:

- **Shift planning and investments** to create a sustainable transportation system that will reduce the need to drive and provide high-quality alternatives that are more convenient, efficient, and low-cost than driving.
- **Improve alignment of land use planning and development** with climate and equity goals to accelerate infill development, affirmatively further fair housing, and increase natural and working lands protection, in furtherance of the State's planning priorities.

### **State VMT Legislation:**

Senate Bill 743 changed the way transportation impacts are measured under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). Replacing the previous Level of Service (LOS) method, which measured vehicle delay in traffic jams- for example, with VMT, which measures the distance vehicles travel. Under CEQA, jurisdictions will use new metrics, thresholds, and develop mitigation measures around VMT that may include:

**Transportation Demand Management (TDM)** that reduces reliance on the single-occupant vehicle (SOV) by supporting infrastructure for biking, walking, transit, ridesharing and carpooling such as bicycle parking, streetscape improvements (e.g., sidewalks, crosswalks, curb-extensions, lighting, etc.), carshare parking and membership, and transit passes.

**Land use management** through changes in project design, such as including units in the project be affordable to lower-income residents and including a mix of uses within the project to support the provisions of services closer to where people live.



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**Parking management** through reducing or eliminating project parking, unbundling parking from renting or owning a unit, cashing out parking, or pricing parking, which can encourage other forms of transportation and maintain ideal occupancy rates in high value parking spaces. These tools can also educate people about the cost of vehicle trips.

### **Funding Support:**

- The State has a variety of funding programs, such as the [Transit and Intercity Rail Capital Program](#), [Low Carbon Transit Operation Program](#), [Active Transportation Program](#), [Clean Mobility Options](#), [Planning and Capacity Building](#), [Clean Mobility in Schools](#), [Sustainable Transportation Equity Project](#), [Affordable Housing and Sustainable Communities Program](#), [Transformative Climate Communities](#), and [Regional Early Action Planning Grants Program 2.0](#). These address VMT reduction through investments in mobility choices and infrastructure to support public transportation, walking, biking, carsharing, and transit-oriented development.

### **Challenges and Opportunities:**

A potentially limiting factor in California's ability to reduce VMT is **job-housing balance**, resulting in longer distances between where people work and places people live. This, coupled with the lack of affordable housing and declining **employment density**, creates challenges for implementing walk/bike and public transit options as both housing and job centers are more spread out. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated these challenges. To address these regional challenges and support VMT reduction, the following actions could be considered:

- Zoning reforms to allow flexible transit-oriented, mixed-use, mixed-income development at higher densities.
- Incentivize employers to locate in housing-rich communities served by transit.
- Encourage affordable and market rate housing near employment centers.
- Transform aging malls, office parks, and publicly owned land into neighborhoods with housing, office, commercial development, and multimodal transportation facilities.

### **Example VMT Policies:**

Strong planning at the local level includes goal setting with **measurable actions** and **benchmarks**, identified **funding**, dedicated **staff**, and an implementation **timeline** that can ensure policies move forward even as administrations cycle. Local jurisdictions can include such policies in general plans, climate action plans, and municipal codes. Achieving VMT reduction requires a complex and synergistic policy approach that combines high density land use, employment density, increased active transportation, transit, new mobility, and ridesharing options, pricing incentives, and equity considerations. These policy areas are strengthened



through their combined implementation. Below are a few examples of policy approaches that address VMT.

**El Dorado County, 2019:** “MEASURE LU-Q Promote Infill Development: The program shall be linked to land-use, housing, air quality, transportation and circulation strategies that support development within existing communities, reduce vehicle miles traveled, increase energy efficiency, and encourage the development of affordable housing.”

**Sacramento City, 2023:** LUP-1.1: Compact Urban Footprint. The City shall promote a land- and resource-efficient development pattern and the placement of infrastructure to support efficient delivery of public services and conserve open space, reduce vehicle miles traveled, and improve air quality.

**Sacramento County, 2017:** “Objective: Coordinate private development with the provision of adequate public facilities and services. LU-68. Give the highest priority for public funding to projects that facilitate and encourage infill, reuse, redevelopment and rehabilitation, mixed-use development, particularly in Environmental Justice Communities, and that will result in per-person vehicle miles traveled lower than the County average, and the lowest priority for projects that do not comply with public facilities Master Plan phasing sequences (Sacramento County General Plan, 2017).”

**City of San Jose, 2023:** Goal LU-5 – Neighborhood Serving Commercial. Locate viable neighborhood-serving commercial uses throughout the City in order to stimulate economic development, create complete neighborhoods, and minimize vehicle miles traveled.

**City of Los Angeles, 2016:** 5.2 Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT): Support ways to reduce vehicle miles traveled (VMT) per capita. Reducing VMT requires a combination of sustainable approaches working together:

- Land use policies aimed at shortening the distance between housing, jobs, and services that reduce the need to travel long distances on a daily basis.
- Increasing the availability of affordable housing options with proximity to transit stations and major bus stops.
- Offering more attractive non-vehicle alternatives, including transit, walking, and bicycling
- Transportation Demand Management (TDM) programs that encourage ride-sharing
- Pricing mechanisms that encourage commuters to consider alternatives to driving alone, including:
  - Congestion or cordon pricing, which would charge vehicles entering into a congested area (such as downtown during rush hour)



**City of Arroyo Grande, 2013:** “TL-7.2: Develop a form-based zoning code for the central business district/downtown. Form-based codes emphasize building form rather than use. This increases flexibility for a variety of complementary uses to be permitted in the same area, and the potential for mixed-use development, which helps to reduce vehicle miles traveled.”