



Vehicles Miles Traveled (VMT) Mitigation Program Frequently Asked Questions

1. What are Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT)?

VMT refers to the distance a car travels. A single car traveling one mile would generate one VMT, and four cars traveling 10 miles would generate 40 VMT. Transportation planners and engineers often use VMT as a metric to help decision makers understand the environmental effects of land use and transportation changes.

2. What is mitigation?

Mitigation is the reduction of something harmful or the reduction of its harmful effects. In general, mitigation can be achieved through avoidance, minimization, and/or compensation. This program aims to mitigate negative effects of VMT such as greenhouse gas emissions (GHGs), by establishing a menu of options to reduce those effects.

3. What is the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA)?

The California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) is a California statute passed in 1970. CEQA requires public agencies to “look before they leap” and consider the environmental consequences of their actions. CEQA is intended to inform government decision-makers and the public about the potential environmental effects of proposed activities and to prevent significant and avoidable environmental damage.

4. Why is Metro concerned with mitigating VMT?

VMT is correlated with environmental impacts like GHGs. In the state of California alone, motor vehicle travel accounts for approximately 40% of the total GHG emissions. While the state of CA has aggressive vehicle electrification goals which will also help reduce GHG emissions, Metro is committed to mitigating and reducing VMT to further reduce GHG emissions, doing our part to combat the effects of climate change.

In response to recent changes to CEQA, public agencies and private project sponsors are now required to use VMT to measure the environmental effects of land use projects, with discretion left to CEQA lead agencies for measuring the environmental effects of transportation projects.

Caltrans, the state agency that owns and operates the State Highway System (SHS), also uses VMT as the metric to determine environmental impacts of transportation projects, for those projects on the SHS that increase vehicle capacity.

5. Why is Metro affected by Caltrans' VMT requirements?

Metro is a partner on Caltrans projects, with both agencies jointly responsible for planning projects and managing the environmental clearance process to produce the required CEQA documents. These projects occur on the SHS, which Caltrans owns and operates, so Metro operates according to Caltrans rules. Because Caltrans is the owner and operator of the SHS, they are the CEQA lead agency for any projects on the system. In this role, Caltrans approves the environmental clearance of projects, and they have established a policy of using VMT as the primary CEQA metric, applied to all projects on the SHS regardless of funding source or sponsor agency. This means that Metro must follow the policy and analyze VMT for CEQA review of capacity-increasing projects on the SHS that are included in Metro's voter-approved programs, including Measure R and M sales tax measures.

6. Why is Metro moving forward with projects that generate VMT?

Metro is the lead County Transportation Authority that plans, operates, coordinates, funds, and builds out the county-wide multi-modal transportation system in Los Angeles County. As part of that responsibility, Metro also funds projects on the State Highway System.

While VMT is an important consideration in the decision to pursue projects on the SHS, a highway project's benefits, including improved mobility and safety, accommodation of efficient goods movement, and congestion reduction are weighed holistically to determine whether projects should move forward.

Today, Metro relies on input from county subregions about their priorities for county transportation investments. Based on voter-approved major capital projects and depending on subregional priorities, some projects on the SHS that advance are expected to generate VMT.

7. What are the goals of Metro’s VMT Mitigation Program?

The main goal of the VMT Mitigation Program (Program) is to provide a way for Metro’s highway investments to reduce their VMT impacts. By identifying, investing in, and tracking actions that reduce VMT, such as improvements to walking, bicycling and transit systems, Metro can improve multi-modal mobility and access for people who drive, and people who would like to drive less, while meeting the transportation impact requirements under CEQA.

8. How will the VMT Mitigation Program benefit my community?

VMT creates both benefits and burdens. Approximately 85% of people drive – creating VMT – to access economic, educational, and recreational opportunities that could not be reached using other modes or could not be reached as quickly. The popularity of vehicle travel shows that it serves an important purpose and has a meaningful place in the transportation system. However, VMT also creates burdens: emission of air pollution and GHGs, collisions, and a built environment that can feel hostile for people traveling by other modes besides a vehicle. Metro’s VMT Mitigation Program aims to balance the burdens with new benefits, investing in new or expanded opportunities to drive less, for those who want to.

This Program can also directly improve people’s access to transportation resources in places with the largest transportation and access disparities. A key priority of this Program is to target mitigation action investments to areas within Metro-defined Equity Focus Communities (EFCs) and for low-income residents that experience a high transportation cost burden. These investments can improve access to opportunity for communities and individuals experiencing “transportation poverty” (e.g., they are not able to travel as much as they would like to due to constraints in time and cost). For more information about Metro’s Equity Platform and EFCs, visit www.metro.net/about/equity-race/.

9. How will the VMT Mitigation Program reduce congestion in LA County?

While VMT is not a measure of congestion, investments in actions that reduce VMT will decrease the overall demand for vehicle travel. Individually, anyone who decides to forgo driving and take advantage of Metro’s investments in VMT-reducing actions may spend less time stuck behind the wheel in traffic, could improve their own personal health, and contribute to a cleaner environment.

10. Will the community have input on the VMT Mitigation Program?

Yes, Metro is seeking input on the Program throughout its development.

11. What kinds of VMT-reducing actions will Metro consider?

Many of the VMT-reducing actions that are identified through this effort will emphasize multi-modal and “smart growth” strategies, providing more options for people to get around without a car and enabling more housing and jobs near transit. Mitigation actions that could be funded through this Program fall into three categories:

- i. Operational improvements like transit service expansion, improving the frequency and speed of transit across more neighborhoods in LA County. This could also include the expansion of programs such as micro-mobility services or bikeshare systems.
- ii. Program improvements like transportation demand management (TDM) and employer programs that provide discounted or free transit passes, travel incentive programs, and resources that encourage people to carpool, telecommute, use active transportation, or ride transit.
- iii. Capital Improvement Projects (CIPs) that offer new physical improvements to the transportation network, like new bus lanes or Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) lines, new multi-modal paths or bike lanes, and new pedestrian improvements to sidewalks.

12. Who gets to choose which VMT-reducing actions are funded?

The team working on the development of this Program will be listening to stakeholder feedback through meetings and conversations with local cities, subregional councils of governments, and wants to hear your priorities. As the agency leading the development of the Program, Metro and its Board of Directors will ultimately decide what actions to fund.

13. How and when will VMT-reducing actions receive funding?

Each highway project that requires VMT mitigation will have to identify and fund VMT mitigation actions. There are a few options for the specific program structure that would facilitate this investment, including a VMT Bank, VMT Exchange, or VMT Reduction Plan. Metro is still deciding which program structure best meets the needs of the projects and the county.

- i. A VMT Bank creates a monetary value on VMT reduction based on the cost of reducing VMT through pre-selected actions. A project applicant could then purchase the specific number of “VMT reduction credits” that the project requires, and the VMT Bank administrator would allocate the funding to the pre-selected actions as it accumulates.
- ii. A VMT Exchange would require each project applicant to select and fund and/or implement a specific mitigation action or actions from a pre-

selected list of actions that each have a defined reduction amount, to meet their overall VMT reduction needs.

- iii. A VMT Reduction Plan creates an overarching, agency-wide approach to balancing increases and decreases in VMT. This wouldn't require additional specific action from highway projects, as long as the project is consistent with what is included in the VMT Reduction Plan.

The investments in VMT-reducing actions that are specifically attached to the highway projects requiring mitigation will happen along the same timeline as the highway project itself.

14. How will Metro measure the success of the VMT Mitigation Program?

Short-term success of the Program will be measured by Board of Directors approval of a CEQA-defensible VMT mitigation framework and tools that will position Metro to be responsive to various priorities, including delivery of voter approved SHS projects and programs as well as Board of Directors and State of California environmental policies.

This framework and tools will include the development of a refined VMT impact analysis approach for the Los Angeles County context, the development of a VMT mitigation quantification tool, and the prioritization of eligible Metro-specific and Countywide projects and programs that demonstrate quantifiable VMT reductions, including those that support walking, biking, transit, and affordable housing. The development of a VMT mitigation framework will position Metro and other Los Angeles County jurisdictions and agencies to deliver projects on and off the SHS while being fully compliant with SB 743.

Long-term success will include continued refinement of framework options, including potential development of a VMT Bank, VMT Exchange, or a VMT Reduction Plan, which will position Metro and our subregional partners to continue to meet a variety of goals and objectives across our transportation system. This includes goals like facilitating delivery of voter-approved highway improvement projects, enhancements to mobility for all modes, and completion of projects that further the goals identified in Metro's Vision 2028 Strategic Plan, LRTP, and the Goods Movement Strategic Plan. Success across these broad objectives will contribute to a vibrant economy, and enhanced mobility for people and goods.