



Amy Eberwein <amy.eberwein@hcaog.net>

Fwd: Comments for TAC on STIP Projects

Beth Burks <beth.burks@hcaog.net>
To: Amy Eberwein <amy.eberwein@hcaog.net>

Tue, Oct 3, 2023 at 2:48 PM

On Tue, Oct 3, 2023 at 11:56 AM Colin Fiske <colin.fiske@gmail.com> wrote:

Hi Beth,

Please accept these comments on the proposed 2023 STIP projects, and please forward them to TAC members as well.

The list of proposed STIP projects highlights the need for a reliable, consistent and quantitative scoring and prioritization tool. The self-attested check-box method for assessing whether projects help promote RTP goals is not working, as the paperwork accompanying these proposals demonstrates. Specifically:

- **A project cannot simultaneously increase vehicular capacity (or improve LOS) and also reduce VMT or encourage mode shift.** The principle is simple and extensively researched: increased vehicular capacity induces more driving. A project that provides new infrastructure for bikes and pedestrians may improve bike/ped safety, which is very important. But if it also increases vehicular capacity, it will still induce more driving, and will not shift a significant number of trips or miles from cars to other modes.
 - The Arcata Sunset Ave Interchange project and the Fortuna Kenmar Interchange projects add some safety features for bikes and pedestrians (more on this below). But they are also specifically designed to increase vehicular capacity/improve LOS. Therefore, the boxes for "Mode Shift" and "Lowers VMT" should not be checked for these projects. In fact, these projects will likely increase VMT.
- **Significant mode shift can only occur when facilities are designed to provide low levels of traffic stress for a broad cross-section of potential users.** Simply providing a standard bike lane or crosswalk on a busy road may improve safety for existing users, which is important. But it will not induce a significant number of new people to walk or bike if the level of traffic stress (LTS) is still high, because research shows that the vast majority of Americans will only walk or bike under low-stress conditions.
 - The county's Central Ave project proposes to add Class II bike lanes to a stretch of road with a 45 mph speed limit. This will improve safety somewhat over current conditions, but based on a standard methodology would still result in a LTS 3 or 4 facility - one that fewer than 15% of the population would consider using. Therefore, the boxes for "Mode Shift" and "Lowers VMT" should not be checked for these projects.
- **Mode shift lowers VMT.** Mode shift involves converting trips or miles traveled from cars/trucks to other modes. Mode shift therefore automatically lowers VMT. (Non-replacement bike/ped/transit trips can also be stimulated, such as new recreational trips, but this isn't mode shift. And VMT can also be lowered by reducing driving trips without converting them to other modes, but these kinds of TDM programs are rarely if ever proposed for HCAOG funding.) The fact that three projects check the box for "Mode Shift" without also checking "Lowers VMT" indicates some fundamental confusion about the meaning of HCAOG's Safe & Sustainable Transportation targets:
 - The Arcata Sunset Ave Interchange project, as discussed above, will result in neither mode shift nor VMT reduction.
 - The Eureka Myrtle Ave project may be able to claim Mode Shift & VMT reduction if it results in a bike LTS of 1 or 2. However, the project does not appear to address intersection safety for bicyclists, which if unaddressed will leave LTS high enough that neither Mode Shift nor VMT reduction could feasibly be claimed.
 - The Eureka Bay to Zoo Trail can make a good argument for Mode Shift and thus also for VMT reduction, and both should be counted.
- **Safety is often dependent on design details.** Safety improvements for vehicles do not always translate into safety improvements for other modes, and it is quite difficult to assess the safety impact of many projects for particular groups of users without a greater degree of design detail. For example, roundabouts generally have a very strong record of improving safety for motorists, but their impacts on other modes seem to depend largely on design.
 - The Arcata and Fortuna Interchange projects both prominently feature roundabouts. These will likely improve safety for motorists. The Arcata project will also likely improve safety for bicyclists due to the inclusion of a Class IV bikeway. However, the safety impacts on pedestrians (and bicyclists in Fortuna) is

not as clear from the design concepts presented. Both projects present concepts with excessive turning radii for vehicles, encouraging higher speeds, and substantial crossing exposure for pedestrians (and bicyclists). It is therefore unclear from the information provided whether and to what extent these projects will improve safety for all modes and all users.

- As noted above, the extent of safety improvements of the Eureka Myrtle Ave project for bicyclists are also uncertain, based on the apparent lack of intersection improvements. This project does not seem to propose safety improvements for other modes.
- **There is no clear and consistent application of the "Access to Essential Destinations" category.** The definition of "essential destinations" is somewhat subjective, as is the definition of "access" itself. Nevertheless, some of the box-checking in this category is clearly inconsistent.
 - The Bay to Zoo Trail provides new safe, low-stress access to clearly essential destinations like the hospital district. The city has not checked the "access" box, but should.
 - The Central Ave project could perhaps make an argument for access to essential destinations, and the county has checked the box, but it is not clear to which destinations they are referring and for whom.
 - The Myrtle Ave project could likely make as strong a claim for improved access as the Central Ave project, but the box is not checked.
- **Every opportunity for improving safety and encouraging mode shift and VMT reduction should be taken.** It is unclear to us why the county would undertake pavings projects such as those proposed on Hubbard Lane and Redwood Drive without incorporating safe complete streets infrastructure. Repaving is the cheapest and easiest time to implement many such improvements.

After a more realistic re-assessment of the proposed projects based on these considerations, only one of the eight proposed projects (the Bay to Zoo Trail) can make a strong case for mode shift and VMT reduction based on the information provided - that's 13% of the projects, not the self-reported 77% and 39%, respectively. Significant questions remain about whether and to what extent the various projects will improve safety and access for different types of road users, putting these categories into question as well.

Clearly, the self-attested box-checking is not an adequate method. HCAOG should adopt a consistent system for objective assessment of the degree to which each project contributes to - or hinders - achievement of each of the major RTP goal areas. And this system should be used to prioritize projects, but also to improve projects when the initial concepts are insufficient to make them competitive for funding.

Thank you.

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Colin Fiske (he/him)
Executive Director
Coalition for Responsible Transportation Priorities
www.transportationpriorities.org



Amy Eberwein <amy.eberwein@hcaog.net>

Public comment - followup from 9/7 TAC meeting

Elaine Astrue <eastrue@gmail.com>
To: amy.eberwein@hcaog.net
Cc: beth.burks@hcaog.net

Tue, Oct 3, 2023 at 1:28 PM

Please accept this written comment letter, with attachments, as public comment for the upcoming meeting of the HCAOG Technical Advisory Committee on October 5, 2023.

The agenda item for this month's meeting is 2. Public Participation on Non-Agenda Items. The relevant agenda item for last month's meeting is 7. Discussion Items a. Draft Funding Consistency Analysis.

On the subject of reducing VMT and increasing mode shift, TAC members seemed in agreement that these required behavior shifts are difficult or even impossible to measure. For example, it was stated that it's not possible to know when a trail is used for recreational purposes or commuting purposes (mode shift). During the meeting, no alternate views or information were provided.

The area of data collection and analysis for transportation planning is advancing rapidly. I thought the committee would appreciate these updates:

- **New Tool Helps Planners and Public Visualize Vehicle Miles Traveled** Fehr & Peers' VMT+ tool uses fine-grained, census-block-level data from StreetLight, a company that collects and manages up-to-date travel information from a wide variety of sources. The data focuses specifically on home-based trips and commutes. The tool is designed to help people visualize how much driving happens locally and regionally, and can be used to help estimate transportation impacts for land use plans and projects.

FEHR & PEERS

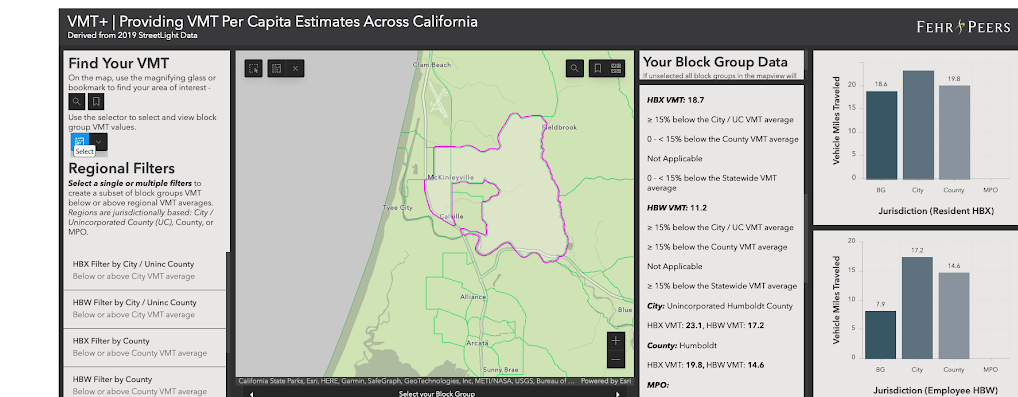
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Find Your VMT With VMT+

A Tool to Support California Transportation Planning

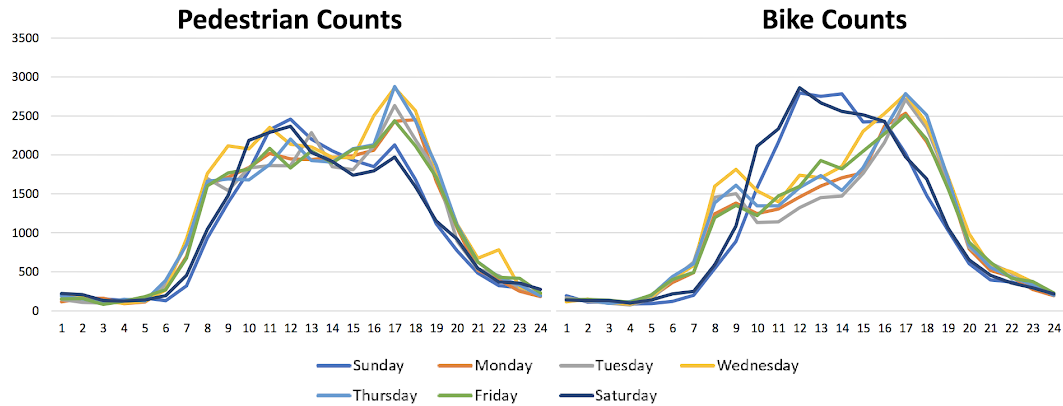
Planners are often required to estimate increases or decreases in driving to help describe the consequences of land use and transportation network decisions. Understanding the amount of vehicle miles traveled, or VMT, generated by a community provides a clearer picture of how integrated their transportation network is with existing land uses and offers insight to the experience of all people traveling.

Many states are beginning to estimate changes in VMT associated with land use and transportation projects as part of a project's evaluation. Frequently, these analyses of VMT require use of local and regional travel demand models, which may not represent current conditions, complete trip lengths, or unique land uses, and can also be time-consuming to operate. VMT+ provides recent estimates based on observed travel conditions with the capability of comparing VMT per capita across regions and the entire state, equipping planners with much more robust and reliable data. Find your VMT below.



- **SMART pathway counter data.** A visual representation of recent trail counter data is on slide 10 (see attached image). For bicycle traffic on this trail, you can clearly see increases in traffic around normal business commute hours. Data from our local trail counters should show this pattern as well.

Travel Patterns: Peak Hours



- Pedestrian travel is steady throughout the day.
- Cyclists have a more defined peak period specific to weekday versus weekend trips.



While I could share additional context and my view on the potential implications of these tools, including how the state decides to fund future trail and road projects, the information would exceed the 3-minute public comment slot. Therefore I recommend that the TAC discuss at a future meeting how to keep up-to-date with tools and developments that affect its work.

Thank you for this opportunity to comment.

Regards,
Elaine Astrue