

Potential State-Level Strategies to Advance Sustainable, Equitable Communities and Reduce Vehicle Miles of Travel (VMT) -- for Discussion

Introduction

California must reduce vehicle miles of travel (VMT) – alongside improvements in vehicle and fuel technology – in order to meet our ambitious greenhouse gas (GHG) reduction goals for the transportation sector. Additionally, research and experience demonstrate that VMT-reducing strategies that increase clean, affordable transportation options such as transit, biking, walking and ride sharing, and promote equitable and efficient land uses including infill development, also provide numerous co-benefits, including improved public health outcomes, household cost savings, reduced energy and water consumption, reduced consumption of natural and working lands, and increased access to economic opportunity, as well as the many benefits of cleaner air due to reduced pollution from vehicles. Therefore, ***strategies to reduce VMT are essential to ensuring both environmental quality and a high quality of life for the future of California.***

Measures to reduce VMT are already being implemented or are under development. California's Metropolitan Planning Organizations are developing their second generation of Sustainable Communities Strategies, describing alignments in land use and transportation planning to reduce the need for light duty vehicle travel, under SB 375. The California Transportation Commission is piloting a road charge program that would assess fees for road maintenance based on the number of miles driven, pursuant to SB 1077. The Governor's Office of Planning and Research is developing updates to the CEQA Guidelines to guide the analysis of project-level transportation impacts, pursuant to SB 743. Once the updated Guidelines go into effect, lead agencies will evaluate the VMT associated with new development as part of the project's environmental review, and, if the impact is significant, mitigate those impacts through VMT-reducing measures.

Below is a list of ***potential*** additional strategies that the State could pursue to help achieve further VMT reduction, support local and regional actions already underway, and advance multiple additional goals. ***Each of these strategies would require further study, evaluation, and public comment.*** They are presented here for the purpose of soliciting public discussion and input.

Section I: Tools to Support More Efficient and More Equitable Development

Changes to the built environment – such as increasing density, improving accessibility to transit, and increasing the diversity of land uses within developed areas – have been demonstrated through extensive research to be among the most significant and critical factors in achieving VMT reductions to a degree that is consistent with California's longer-term GHG reduction goals (i.e. 2050 and beyond). As California grows by a projected 10 million new people by 2050, ***where and how new development occurs to accommodate population growth will impact our ability to reduce VMT and achieve our environmental, health, and quality of life goals.*** Infill development – development in previously-developed areas – helps facilitate growth that aligns with these goals. However, as has been extensively documented, infill development faces numerous financial and other challenges throughout California. Below are potential strategies that could help increase infill development and achieve the land use changes necessary for longer-term VMT reduction.

A. Infill Development and Land Conservation

Explore:

- Encouraging regional Transfer of Development Rights programs to allow owners of natural and working lands to sell their development rights to developers who can use those rights to add additional density to development projects in preferred infill areas.
- Promoting regional Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) funds that leverage public resources with private-sector investment capital to provide flexible capital for TOD projects.
- Rebates for low-VMT/location-efficient housing, similar to programs that use rebates to encourage adoption of energy-efficient appliances, zero-emission cars, water-efficient yards, or renewable energy installation. For example, the rebate could reimburse residents for a portion of the downpayment for purchasing or renting a qualified home, in exchange for a minimum term of residence.
- Promotion of cross-subsidizing multi-station financing districts along transit corridors to leverage revenues from development in strong-market station areas in order to seed needed infrastructure and development in weaker-market station areas.
- Abatement of residential property tax increases in exchange for property-based improvements in distressed infill areas.
- Ways to promote reduced parking in areas where viable transportation alternatives are present.
- Additional creative financing mechanisms to enhance the viability of priority infill projects.
- Ways to promote and strengthen Urban Growth Boundaries to promote infill development and conservation of natural and working lands by defining and limiting developable land within a metropolitan area according to projected growth needs.

B. Equity

- Explore ways to help ensure that infill and transit-oriented development benefits existing residents and businesses, low-income and disadvantaged communities, and minimizes displacement.
- Integrate equity and anti-displacement policies and strategies into the development of any of the potential strategies listed above.

Section II: Infrastructure Investment that is Consistent with the State's Conservation, Development, and Health Goals

State infrastructure investments shape land use and development patterns, contribute to the accessibility of transportation options and other services, and thus help determine to our ability to advance sustainable, equitable communities and meet our climate goals. Prioritizing infrastructure investments to expand access to quality transportation choices and promote vibrant communities can reduce combined housing-transportation expenses for households and promote economic development, encourage active transportation and have significant related health benefits, and play an essential role in helping to meet the State's GHG reduction goals. Below are several options for identifying and prioritizing projects and investments that align with the State's environmental, economic, and equity goals, including VMT and GHG reduction.

A. Performance Measures and Targets

- Explore development and adoption of additional performance measures and targets to inform the selection of transportation capital projects.

B. Transit

- Support an expanded and integrated transit network.
- Support increased transit capacity and levels of service.
- Support bus rapid transit, and separated rail and bus guideways to offer service that will in many cases be faster than car trips.
- Explore transit pass subsidies or other ways to reduce transit fares, particularly for disadvantaged communities, students, seniors, the disabled, and other transit-dependent users.
- Explore ways to implement transit system improvements that increase the safety, attractiveness, reliability, and convenience of transit.

C. Active Transportation

- Support expansion and improvement of active transportation infrastructure to help meet the California Transportation Plan goal of quadrupling active transportation mode share by 2040.
- Explore ways to implement active transportation system improvements that increase the safety, attractiveness, reliability, and convenience of active transportation.
- Explore ways to expand education on multimodal road safety for bicyclists, pedestrians, and drivers.

D. Shared Mobility

- Explore ways to expand access to car share, bike share, and ride share services.

E. Green Construction Practices

- Explore ways to increase use of lower-carbon construction materials for transportation infrastructure projects.
- Explore ways to increase sustainable landscaping practices for transportation infrastructure projects that contribute to the enhancement of a multi-modal transportation system.

F. Non-Transportation Infrastructure

- Continue to increase and prioritize the location efficiency of State real property investments to encourage State facilities in low-VMT locations.

G. Research

- Continue to study and develop policies around driverless vehicle technology that promote sustainable and equitable land use and reduce VMT.

H. Equity

- Explore ways to help ensure that transportation and other infrastructure investments benefit existing residents and businesses, low-income and disadvantaged communities, and minimize displacement.
- Integrate equity and anti-displacement policies and strategies into the development of any of the potential strategies listed above.

Section III: Pricing Policies

Road and parking pricing policies allow transportation agencies and communities to collect revenues for transportation infrastructure maintenance and improvements that are proportional to the amount that the infrastructure is used. Several extensive studies have found pricing to be among the most impactful long-term VMT and GHG reduction strategies for the transportation sector. When combined with

measures to ensure access to viable transportation alternatives (such as those described in the section above), ***pricing strategies can present cost savings for many drivers, while helping to ensure that infrastructure is appropriately and adequately maintained, and promoting use of transportation alternatives.*** Revenues can be used to offset cost burdens for low-income drivers and others that may be disproportionately impacted, and to enhance and expand additional transportation alternatives. Below are several options for further exploring and developing pricing policies.

A. Road Pricing

- Develop additional highway express lanes under the authority of AB 194 that offer access to high-occupancy vehicle lanes to single occupant drivers willing to pay a toll, with related revenue supportive of road maintenance and improving multi-modal travel options on the corridor.
- Continue to pilot and develop mileage-based road pricing strategies as an alternative to the gasoline tax.
- Explore ways to expand access to pay-as-you-drive auto insurance options.
- Study options for implementing Cordon Pricing in high-congestion areas where viable transportation alternatives are available.
- Explore creation of Low-Emission Zones that establish more stringent emission standards for select types of heavy-duty vehicles (e.g. parcel delivery) within designated sensitive residential and congested urban areas and charge fees for select types of heavy-duty vehicles entering the zone that do not meet the established standard.

B. Parking Pricing

- Explore ways to encourage demand-based parking pricing strategies where transportation alternatives are present.

C. Equity

- Ensure that pricing policies and programs include measures to use program revenues to offset cost increases for low-income and disadvantaged communities.
- Prioritize access to voluntary VMT-based pricing options for low-income households that could benefit from potential cost savings.
- Integrate policies and strategies that enhance equity and avoid inequitable cost burdens into the development of any of the potential strategies listed above.

Section IV: Transportation System Efficiency

Maximizing the efficiency of existing transportation infrastructure is key to ensuring the effective movement of people and goods to their destinations and reducing transportation costs. Below are several options for reducing congestion and improving system efficiency that also reduce emissions, VMT, and GHGs and contribute to sustainable, equitable communities.

D. Commute Trips

Explore:

- Promoting teleworking and alternative work schedules.
- Incentives for use of transit and active transportation for commuting.
- Increasing ride sharing to work to help meet the California Transportation Plan goal of increasing carpool vehicles by 15% by 2040.
- Promoting travel to schools via active transportation, ride sharing, and transit.

- Commute trip reduction programs and policies for the State workforce.

E. Eco-Driving

- Explore ways to promote eco-driving education.

F. Transportation Management Systems

- Continue studying and implementing transportation management systems and other technologies to reduce congestion and lower emissions.
- Explore creation of additional high-occupancy vehicle (HOV) and high-occupancy toll (HOT) lanes.

G. Equity

- Where possible, prioritize commute trip reduction incentives, programs, and benefits for low-income workers that could benefit from potential household cost savings.
- Prioritize eco-driving education for low-income drivers who could benefit from potential fuel cost savings, and in areas of high pollution burden that could benefit from emissions reductions.
- Integrate policies and strategies to enhance equity into the development of any of the potential strategies listed above.