



# CITY OF SANTA BARBARA

## COUNCIL AGENDA REPORT

**AGENDA DATE:** November 19, 2013

**TO:** Mayor and Council members

**FROM:** Transportation Division, Public Works Department and Planning Division, Community Development Department

**SUBJECT:** Adoption Of Updated Traffic Impact Significance Thresholds

### RECOMMENDATION:

That Council adopt, by reading of title only, A Resolution of the Council of the City of Santa Barbara Establishing Updated Traffic Impact Significance Thresholds Consistent with the City Traffic Management Strategy in the Non-Residential Growth Management Program.

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

The recommended City Council action would implement the City Traffic Management Strategy with updated traffic impact significance thresholds, for use in environmental review of projects under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), and for applying land use policy limitations to projects with significant traffic impacts.

In March, City Council adopted the Traffic Management Strategy as part of the Non-Residential Growth Management Program with the intent of minimizing future traffic congestion while allowing incremental growth and economic development. The 2011 General Plan Program Environmental Impact Report (EIR) identified up to 26 intersections where significant future traffic congestion is expected to occur during the peak travel times due to limited intersection capacity. The Traffic Management Strategy established that a significant project-specific impact occurs at the point that an individual project uses a disproportionate share of remaining intersection capacity.

This action by Council will update the project-specific traffic threshold of significance, and confirm the existing cumulative traffic threshold to be consistent with the Traffic Management Strategy. Updating the thresholds will also streamline the land development review process for developers and save process costs.

Following adoption of the updated traffic impact significance thresholds, staff will incorporate them as part of the City CEQA environmental review procedures, including

the Master Environmental Assessment guidelines, an updated Initial Study form, etc., and would provide briefings on their use as needed as part of project review processes.

## **DISCUSSION:**

The Program Environmental Impact Report (EIR) and traffic model prepared for the 2011 General Plan Update found that up to 26 intersections are either already impacted or could become cumulatively impacted by the year 2030 as a result of anticipated incremental citywide development (see Attachment 1 - Map of 26 intersections). As part of the General Plan Update process, City Council adopted a statement of overriding considerations, finding that the benefits of the General Plan outweighed the significant cumulative traffic effects, thereby deeming the traffic effects acceptable. However, Council also directed that the traffic effects should be reduced to the extent feasible.

In March of this year, City Council adopted the Non-Residential Growth Management Program to implement the General Plan land use development policies. As part of the Program, Council adopted a Traffic Management Strategy designed to reduce the cumulative traffic impacts of land use growth, while balancing the need for incremental development and economic health.

The Traffic Management Strategy supports and implements the City's policy for limited nonresidential growth and will minimize future traffic impacts on City roadways. The Strategy identifies that a project-specific traffic impact is the tipping point when one project's traffic generation would use up a disproportionate amount of the remaining traffic capacity. The Strategy allows most developments, but limits those that use too much of the remaining roadway and intersection capacity. Non-residential projects that may be considered for approval with a significant project-specific traffic impact are specified by the Strategy policies (e.g., reconstruction of demolished floor area; minor additions; community benefit projects; public facilities; vacant sites, etc.).

### **Threshold of Significance for Project-Specific Traffic Impact**

One of the key mechanisms of the Traffic Management Strategy is the determination of when the traffic generation of a single project is considered to use a disproportionate share of the remaining traffic capacity, and therefore constitute a significant project-specific traffic impact for CEQA environmental review and policy consistency purposes. An 'impacted intersection' is defined by Santa Barbara policy as a 77% or greater vehicle traffic volume-to-intersection capacity ratio, which represents a high "C" level of service (LOS) within the A to F range of operating conditions. The current City traffic threshold for significant project-specific impacts is as follows:

***Existing Significance Threshold for Project-Specific Traffic Impact:*** A significant project-specific traffic impact would result if a project's net peak-hour traffic generation would increase the volume-to-capacity (V/C) ratio at an intersection to .77 or greater, or would increase the V/C ratio by .01 or more

when an intersection is already operating at .77 or greater V/C ratio during peak hours.

A disadvantage with the existing project-specific threshold is that it considers the traffic impact of a project as a snapshot in time in comparison to existing traffic conditions. The updated threshold, while still using the 1% increase, considers the longer-term impact of the project's traffic generation in the context of intersections anticipated to become cumulatively impacted with incremental growth, with the 26 intersections specified in the threshold. Recent changes to the State CEQA Guidelines and recent CEQA case law have supported this type of change to consider traffic impact thresholds within the context of an overall traffic management program. The proposed updated threshold reads as follows:

***New Significance Threshold for Project-Specific Traffic Impact:*** A significant project-specific traffic impact would result if a project's net peak-hour traffic generation would constitute 1% or more of the intersection capacity at one or more of the following intersections:

- |                                         |                                         |                                             |
|-----------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|
| 1. Olive Mill & Coast Village           | 10. Carrillo & Highway 101 NB Ramps     | 19. Las Positas & Calle Real                |
| 2. Milpas & Highway 101 SB On/Off Ramps | 11. Carrillo & Highway 101 SB Ramps     | 20. Las Positas & Highway 101 SB Ramps      |
| 3. Milpas & Quinientos                  | 12. Carrillo & San Andres               | 21. Las Positas & Modoc                     |
| 4. Milpas & Haley                       | 13. Mission & State                     | 22. Las Positas & Cliff                     |
| 5. Garden & Gutierrez                   | 14. Mission & Highway 101 NB Ramps      | 23. Hitchcock & State                       |
| 6. Garden & Highway 101 NB Ramps        | 15. Mission & Highway 101 SB Ramps      | 24. La Cumbre & State                       |
| 7. Garden & Highway 101 SB Ramps        | 16. Mission & Modoc                     | 25. Hope & State                            |
| 8. Castillo & Haley                     | 17. Las Positas & State                 | 26. Hope, Calle Real & Highway 101 NB Ramps |
| 9. Castillo & Highway 101 SB Ramps      | 18. Calle Real & Highway 101 NB On-Ramp |                                             |

### **Threshold for a Project Contribution to Cumulative Traffic Impacts**

CEQA requires that environmental impact analysis consider both project-specific impacts and project contributions to significant cumulative impacts. The currently used City

threshold for contributions to cumulative traffic impacts is proposed to be retained, and the Council action would affirm it. It reads as follows:

***Existing Cumulative Traffic Threshold:*** A considerable project contribution to cumulative traffic effects would result when a project's net peak-hour traffic together with other cumulative traffic from existing and reasonably foreseeable projects would cause an intersection to exceed 0.77 V/C; or when the project would contribute peak-hour traffic to an intersection already exceeding 0.77 V/C.

The Program EIR for the 2011 General Plan provided a citywide cumulative traffic analysis to the year 2030 using this threshold. Development projects within the growth assumptions of this EIR analysis will be considered to contribute to the cumulative traffic effects identified in the Program EIR. This includes projects with net new residential units and projects with net new non-residential square footage.

### **Traffic Impact Assessment Procedures**

CEQA regulations provide that if a proposed project is consistent with the development density established in a General Plan for which a Program EIR was certified, additional environmental review is not generally required, except as necessary to address unique project-specific significant impacts. Most land development proposals within the City limits are not large enough to trigger project-specific traffic impacts. As a result, the Council's investment in a Program EIR and overriding considerations of the cumulative traffic impact will facilitate and streamline the Land Development Team's traffic review of land development proposals.

Staff reviews all discretionary projects for potential traffic impacts. If a project could possibly have significant project-specific traffic impacts, the General Plan EIR Traffic Model will be used to determine the project level impact assessment. In July 2013, Council established a land development nominal fee to charge developers for an assessment using a site-specific traffic model analysis. The single fee will pay for a third party (consultant) assessment of the project using the City-developed traffic model.

By naming the intersections in the proposed project-specific traffic impact threshold, the time and expense of additional traffic counts and typical traffic analysis reports will be substantially reduced.

Traffic analysis for projects at the airport and surrounding parcels will not be subject to the updated threshold, because it is specific to the 26 intersections within the main part of the City jurisdiction. Projects in the outlying airport area will continue to use the traditional City threshold and be coordinated with the County, City of Goleta, and Caltrans and established thresholds for roadways in their jurisdictions as appropriate.

In some cases developers may be required to conduct additional site-specific traffic engineering pertaining to circulation and traffic. While a project may not have broader environmental traffic congestion consequences from trip generation, a project can

disrupt the flow of traffic where driveways connect to City roadways or are in close proximity to intersections which may not be currently signalized. In these cases, site-specific traffic engineering and improvements may be required of land developers. These types of improvements can be expensive depending on the extent needed.

### **Monitoring of Traffic Levels and Land Use**

The Community Development Department will continue tracking land use development as part of the Growth Management Program and General Plan Adaptive Management Program. The Transportation Division will periodically conduct traffic counts to update traffic levels of service at City intersections. At that time, a traffic model run will also be conducted with updated land use data to compare its results to the traffic counts.

### **CEQA Review**

The action to adopt updated traffic thresholds is within the scope of the 2011 General Plan Update and Program EIR, and implementing Traffic Management Strategy. Section 15183 of the State CEQA Guidelines mandates that implementing actions consistent with General Plan policies for which an EIR was certified shall not require additional environmental review. The environmental analyst prepared a Certificate of Determination that Council action qualifies for this CEQA exemption. Council findings confirming this CEQA determination are included in the draft Council Resolution.

### **BUDGET/FINANCIAL INFORMATION:**

City Council established a Traffic Model Data Collection fee in July 2013, which accumulates in direct relationship to the amount of new traffic generated by land developments. New traffic counts and a traffic model run will be conducted when the accumulation of fees equals the amount of funding needed for the traffic evaluation.

### **SUSTAINABILITY IMPACT:**

The updated traffic impact thresholds would implement Council General Plan and Growth Management Program goals for limiting the traffic effects of development and living within our resources, including roadway capacity. The threshold would also support Climate Plan goals for applying land use and transportation policies to reduce transportation-related carbon emissions that contribute to climate change.

- ATTACHMENTS:** Map of 26 Intersections
- PREPARED BY:** Rob Dayton, Principal Transportation Planner  
Barbara Shelton, Environmental Analyst
- SUBMITTED BY:** Paul Casey, Community Development Director
- APPROVED BY:** City Administrator's Office



