

LOS to VMT Transition: Things Local Agencies Should Be Thinking About

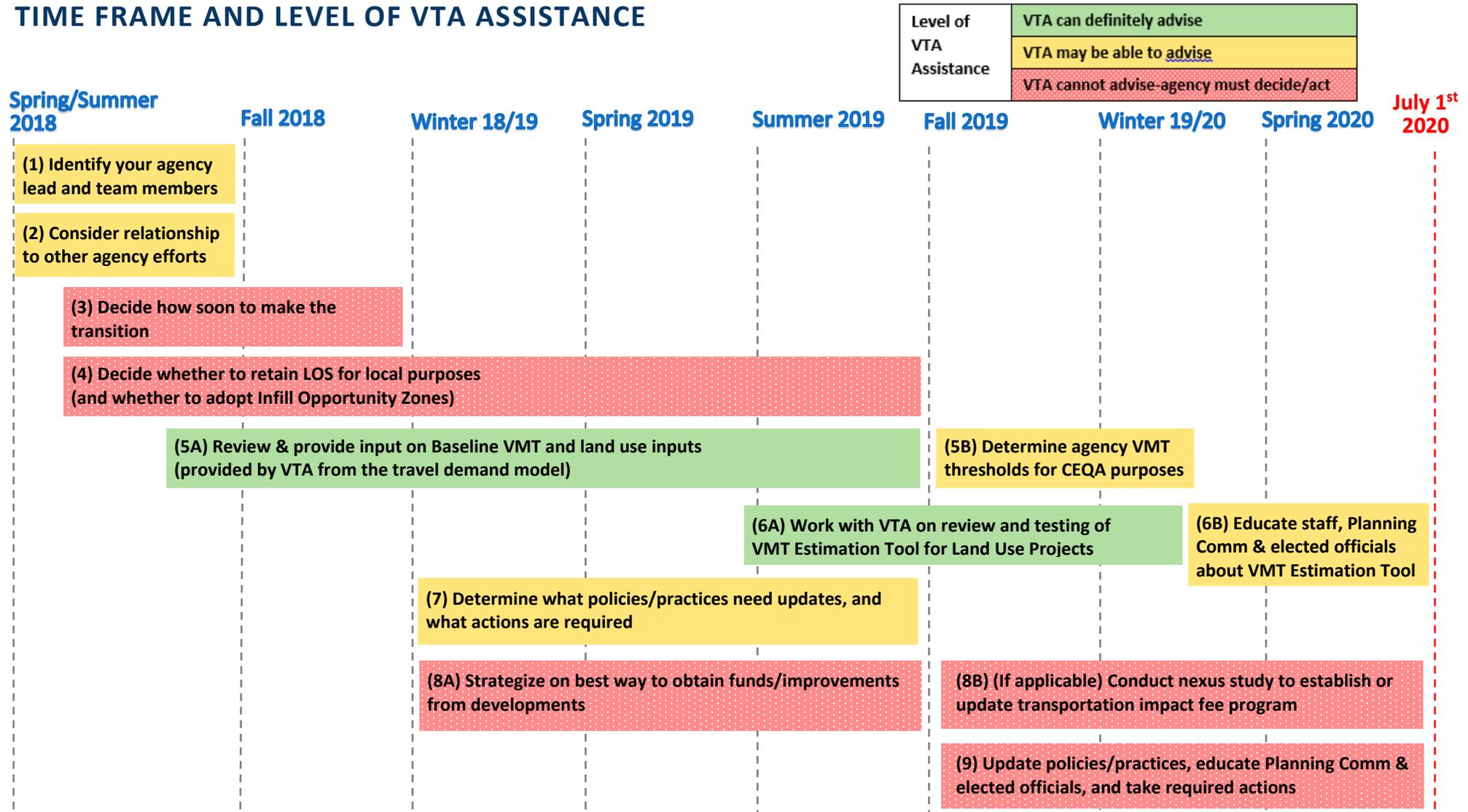
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Please note: Each Lead Agency should consult with CEQA experts and legal counsel regarding their own CEQA practices and updates to local policies

TIME FRAME AND LEVEL OF VTA ASSISTANCE



NOTES AND ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

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1) **Identify your agency lead and team members**

Shifting from Level of Service (LOS) to Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT) to align with Senate Bill (SB) 743 may involve staff in Transportation/Engineering, Planning, Environmental, Legal/Counsel, Economic Development, and City Manager/County Executive. Agencies may wish to engage consultant assistance in certain areas as well.

2) **Consider relationship to other agency efforts**

Shifting emphasis towards VMT may relate to other initiatives that are underway or planned at your agency, such as a General Plan update, area plan or major development project, implementation/update of a fee program, or implementation/update of a Transportation Demand Management (TDM) ordinance.

3) **Decide how soon to make the transition**

The amended CEQA Guidelines from the California Natural Resources Agency and the updated Technical Advisory from the Governor's Office of Planning and Research (OPR) issued in December 2018 called for all Lead Agencies to begin using VMT for CEQA purposes by **July 1, 2020**. Your agency should decide whether to make the switch now, or at the July 2020 mandatory date.

4) **Decide whether to retain LOS for local purposes (and whether to adopt IOZs)**

SB 743 requires that Lead Agencies stop using LOS/delay-based measures in CEQA, but does not change state Congestion Management Program law (which still emphasizes LOS) and does not prevent agencies from using LOS for local purposes under their police power. Whether to retain LOS for local analysis (and whether to designate Infill Opportunity Zones/IOZs if your agency is eligible) will depend on the goals and values of your agency and constituents.

5) **A) Review and provide input on Baseline VMT and land use inputs**

Baseline VMT levels are estimated using travel demand models which include land use inputs (numbers of people, households, and jobs allocated to zones) and a transportation network. VTA will provide draft Baseline VMT information and land use inputs for its agencies, but agency staff will need to review and provide input.

B) Determine what VMT thresholds your agency will select for CEQA purposes

OPR provides recommendations to help select thresholds (e.g., 15% below baseline levels in some cases, no net increase in others) but it is up to each Lead Agency to select thresholds. Agencies should educate Planning Commissioners and elected officials to help them understand the implications of the threshold selection.

6) **A) Work with VTA on review & testing of VMT Estimation Tool for Land Use Projects**

OPR gives Lead Agencies wide discretion on how to estimate VMT for specific projects. For land use projects, some projects may be "screened out" from VMT analysis based on their location and characteristics. For those that require analysis, larger or more complex projects may require running a model, but more routine projects may use a "sketch tool" (i.e., spreadsheet or web tool). VTA is developing a countywide web-based VMT Estimation Tool, but agency staff will need to review and test the tool, and determine methods for land use types not covered by the tool.

B) Train staff and educate Planning Commission/elected officials about use of VMT Estimation Tool for Land Use Projects

Once the countywide VMT Estimation Tool is available, local agencies should train their staff so they can explain the tool and interpret results. Agencies should also educate their Planning Commissioners and elected officials so they are prepared once projects with VMT analysis begin coming to them for review and action.

7) **Determine what policies/practices need updates, and what actions are required**

The use of LOS is often codified in an agency's General Plan, and then implemented through staff practice. However, agencies may have other Council-adopted policies, or other documents (such as staff-developed guidelines) that call for LOS analysis. Agencies should determine what updates are needed, and what actions (e.g., Council approval, staff-initiated changes) are required.

8) **A) Strategize on best way to obtain funds/improvements from developments**

Removing LOS from CEQA decision-making for land use projects removes one tool agencies have for obtaining transportation funds and improvements. Agencies should strategize on how to replace this tool. One option may be a new or updated transportation impact fee program.

B) (If applicable) Conduct nexus study to establish/update transportation impact fee

If an agency decides to pursue a new/updated impact fee, specialized consultant assistance is typically required to conduct a nexus study as the basis for adoption.

9) **Update policies/practices, educate Planning Commission/elected officials, and take required actions or approvals**

Based on the assessment in Item 7, agencies should educate their Planning Commissioners and elected officials about updated policies/practices, and take the necessary actions before July 2020.