

**Goal 11**     ***REVIEW TRAFFIC IMPACT STANDARDS USED AT CITY INTERSECTIONS FOR CONSISTENCY WITH THE GOALS OF THE CIRCULATION ELEMENT AND GENERAL PLAN.***

*Explore ways to continue the concentration of development Downtown and along transit corridors to facilitate the use of transit and alternative modes of transportation.*

**BACKGROUND**

Land use patterns directly affect the transportation choices that people make. A compact, pedestrian oriented development pattern will provide a greater variety of transportation choices by facilitating modes of transportation other than the automobile. This happens because people can live and work in close proximity to transportation centers and facilities. Conversely, a low-density, sprawling development pattern that segregates residential and non-residential uses limits transportation options and increases dependence on the automobile for mobility. This land use pattern, commonly known as Urban Sprawl, can be seen in many post World War II communities such as Los Angeles and San Jose.

Currently, the amount and density of development that can occur in the City is governed by different sets of regulations. Passed by the voters in 1989, Measure E was incorporated into the City Charter as Charter Section 1508. This Charter Section not only places a ceiling on the total amount of non-residential square footage developed in the City until the year 2010, it also states that new non-residential construction can only occur where it will not cause a significant and unmitigated adverse impact on the City's water resources and *traffic* within the City, or the supply of affordable housing on the South Coast. However, because Measure E has not been incorporated into the City's Local Coastal Program it cannot be used for the purpose of making findings regarding the consistency of any project with the certified Local Coastal Program until such time as the provisions of Measure E are certified through the Coastal Commission through an amendment to the City's Local Coastal Program.

Traffic impacts are currently determined in two different ways. The first way that traffic impacts are determined is by adopted Level of Service (LOS) standards for signalized City intersections. Currently, signalized intersections are considered impacted if they exceed the City's LOS goal of C, which carries a Volume to Capacity Ratio of .80. However, for the purposes of environmental assessment in the City of Santa Barbara under the California Environmental Quality Act, a signalized intersection is considered impacted if a project causes the Volume to Capacity Ratio to exceed .77. By state law, in any case where a project results in a significant traffic impact, an environmental impact report must be prepared.

## **CONSTRAINTS**

The current method for determining traffic impacts acts as a constraint to development in areas where intersections are at or near the maximum allowable capacity. Impacted intersections are typically located near freeway on/off-ramps, Downtown, or near commercial centers. Ironically, it is these compact and higher density areas that will most easily facilitate transit and alternate modes of transportation. In addition, the inability of small businesses to expand in locations at or near impacted intersections may result in the relocation of those businesses to lower density or outlying areas that may not be as suitable for alternative modes of transportation. This will, in turn, increase the reliance on the automobile in these areas and possibly contribute to a sprawling development pattern. In addition, the charter section requirement that new development occur only where it does not cause a significant and unmitigated adverse impact on traffic also acts as a constraint. Traditionally, the methods to mitigate traffic impacts involved improvements to streets, such as street widening, turn lanes, or striping. In a city such as Santa Barbara that is mostly developed, many of these mitigation methods may no longer be feasible or desirable.

## **OPPORTUNITIES**

Santa Barbara currently has several areas with a compact development pattern that can support a transportation system comprised to a large degree of alternative modes of travel (i.e. Downtown and areas adjacent to commercial corridors). By allowing the pattern of compact development to continue in these areas, the use of alternative modes of transportation can be facilitated. In addition, the City can explore ways to allow Small Additions to existing businesses to occur in the Downtown area and along transit corridors near impacted intersections and expand the list of available methods to mitigate traffic impacts. This can include methods such as funding for transit operating costs or partial contributions to larger improvement projects supporting alternative transportation.

## POLICIES AND IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

### TRAFFIC STANDARDS AND IMPACT THRESHOLDS

- 11.1 The City shall facilitate the use of transit and alternative modes of transportation by emphasizing compact, pedestrian oriented development and connections among all forms of travel during the development and environmental review process. Within the Coastal Zone portion of the City, the provisions of Measure E shall not be used for the purpose of making findings regarding the consistency of any project with the certified Local Coastal Program until such time as the provisions of Measure E are certified by the Coastal Commission through an amendment to the City's Local Coastal Program.**
- 11.1.1 Continue to use existing traffic standards and impact thresholds as described in the City's Master Environmental Assessment (MEA), until new standards and thresholds consistent with the 1997 Circulation Element are developed and incorporated into the City's Environmental Goals and Guidelines.
- 11.1.2 In addition to the Implementation Strategies discussed in Chapter 13, Land Use, the City shall facilitate the use of transit and alternative modes by exploring methods such as, but not limited to:
- considering ways to allow Small Additions to existing businesses to occur in the Downtown area and along transit corridors near impacted intersections,
  - considering expanding the list of available methods to mitigate traffic impacts. This can include methods such as funding for transit operating costs or partial contributions to larger improvement projects supporting alternative transportation,
  - reviewing traffic impact standards used at City intersections to see whether they should be raised or lowered for consistency with the goals of the Circulation Element, other elements of the General Plan, and with the City Charter through public worksessions with the Planning Commission and City Council, and
  - considering adoption of the County Congestion Management Plan Level of Service Standards for freeway interchanges. This standard would allow higher volumes of traffic and increased congestion at freeway interchanges.

## MOBILITY SYSTEM

- 11.2            The City shall create an adequately funded mobility system consistent with the vision of this Circulation Element that will increase the access to and convenience of alternative forms of travel.**
- 11.2.1        Increase funding for alternative transportation systems to solve community transportation issues and problems not resulting from new development.
- 11.2.2        Implement the Goals and Policies of Chapter 12, Public Involvement, to involve the community in methods to create a flexible system of mobility.