



METROPOLITAN
TRANSPORTATION
COMMISSION

Agenda Item 5b

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Memorandum

TO: Legislation Committee

DATE: March 6, 2009

FR: Executive Director

RE: AB 1135 (Skinner) Vehicle Miles Traveled Data – Odometer Readings

Description

AB 1135 (Skinner) requires California vehicle owners to report the current odometer reading of their vehicle at the time of vehicle registration. While the vehicle and the mileage information would be public information, to protect privacy, the bill specifies that the name of the vehicle owner would not be public.

Recommendation: Support

Discussion

Under SB 375, Statutes of 2008, the California Air Resources Board (CARB) is required to establish automobile and light truck greenhouse gas reduction targets for regions throughout California. Each region must then incorporate these targets into the development of a Sustainable Communities Strategy that must strive to reach the targets. These targets will be based, in part, upon a key statistic — vehicle miles traveled (VMT) — even though no comprehensive, consistent database on VMT currently exists.

By creating an annually updated, statewide VMT database, AB 1135 would be invaluable in establishing a data source by which to track changes in vehicle use; affecting not only greenhouse gas emission estimates, but also our understanding of travel patterns and other air quality pollutants at the statewide, regional, and local level.

How Is VMT Measured Today?

Vehicle miles traveled are currently estimated through federal Highway Performance Monitoring System (HPMS) data, which is primarily derived from loop detectors on freeways and other traffic counting mechanisms. The data consists of traffic counts collected on a sample basis; done by Caltrans on portions of the state highway system, and by cities and counties on the local streets and road system. The data is collected annually so that different portions of the system are counted every three years; it is then extrapolated to the entire roadway system and reported to the federal government. The data is used as a key factor in calculating federal funds for each state.

One disadvantage of HPMS data is that it does not quantify with any precision how far the vehicles are traveling, nor does it specify origin or destination. Another disadvantage is that the

data quality is quite poor as a result of the limited resources dedicated to this purpose. For instance, an MTC survey conducted in 2003 found that a number of jurisdictions had not updated their data in over seven years.

In addition, metropolitan planning organizations, such as MTC, forecast VMT using travel demand models. These estimates can vary significantly from region to region depending on the model and they are inherently less helpful in measuring the impacts of transit-oriented development and land-use policies in reducing driving at the neighborhood-level of analysis.

The California Air Resources Board also generates VMT estimates using smog check data; however, this data set is limited by the fact that most vehicles are not subject to smog check (and thus do not have their mileage recorded) until after the vehicles are over six years old. A final source of VMT data comes from travel surveys, but these are expensive and can capture only a very small segment of the vehicle population.

Other Benefits of Better VMT Data

In addition to a superior understanding of total greenhouse gas emissions, better VMT data would also improve overall mobile source emissions estimates due to the detailed information on VMT by age of vehicle. Younger vehicles tend to be cleaner, yet driven more than older vehicles. This data would be of critical importance to the CARB and local air quality authorities in monitoring fleet turnover and the efficacy of tailpipe controls in reducing criteria pollutants (ROG, NOX, PM_{2.5}, PM₁₀) and greenhouse gases (CO₂).

Transportation planning models would also improve due to detailed information on VMT by the neighborhood of registration for each household vehicle. Vehicles owned by urban households tend to be driven less than vehicles owned in suburban and rural neighborhoods. This consistent statewide database would be critical in identifying trends in vehicle usage in the rural, suburban, and urban neighborhoods in California.

For the reasons outlined above, we recommend a support position on AB 1135 (Skinner). As the bill moves through the legislative process, we will work to ensure that it strikes a reasonable balance between the protection of privacy and the provision of helpful information.

Known Positions

Support

None

Oppose

None



Steve Heminger