



Item Name: Briefing on Updated Traffic Count Data Collection Policy During COVID-19 Pandemic



Eric Graye, Planning Supervisor, Countywide Planning and Policy Division, eric.graye@montgomeryplanning.org, 301-495-4632



Jason Sartori, Chief, Countywide Planning and Policy Division, jason.sartori@montgomeryplanning.org, 301-495-2172

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Description

On March 14, 2020, the Montgomery County Planning Department initiated an interim policy to not accept transportation impact studies using traffic counts taken during COVID-19 pandemic. The policy was updated on May 7, 2020 to reflect changing conditions and to allow the use of existing counts taken prior to the pandemic, with potential modifications.

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to add uncertainty into traffic analysis in Montgomery County. The impact on business, public offices, schools, other facilities, transit, coupled with the expansion of telework, has substantially reduced the total amount of motor vehicle and other traffic in the county. Nevertheless, Planning staff believes current conditions represent a new normal and that as the pandemic conditions subside, it will take quite a while for traffic volumes to slowly return to pre-pandemic levels.

The Planning Board will be briefed on Planning Department plans to move forward with the collection of traffic counts and the acceptance of transportation impact studies during the pandemic.

Attachment: Planning Staff Memorandum – Traffic Counts During COVID-19 Pandemic – Policy Update



MONTGOMERY COUNTY PLANNING DEPARTMENT
THE MARYLAND-NATIONAL CAPITAL PARK AND PLANNING COMMISSION

ATTACHMENT

September 17, 2020

MEMORANDUM

TO: Gwen Wright, Planning Director

VIA: Jason Sartori, Chief, Countywide Planning & Policy Division

FROM: Eric Graye, Planning Supervisor, Countywide Planning & Policy Division

SUBJECT: **Traffic Counts During COVID-19 Pandemic -Policy Update**

Background

On March 13, 2020, as the State of Maryland and Montgomery County entered a state of emergency and increased restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Montgomery Planning informed transportation consultants that the Department would not accept any transportation impact studies (TIS) based on traffic counts conducted on March 14, or later. On May 7, 2020, the Department initiated an updated temporary policy pertaining to traffic counts to provide opportunities for transportation studies to move forward using historical traffic counts. This temporary policy also provided time to observe how the effect of increased teleworking in the region is manifested in observed traffic conditions. While it is unclear when (or if) traffic will return to pre-March 2020 levels, it appears likely that traffic growth will increase gradually over time.

Recent data obtained from the Maryland State Highway Administration show that current statewide daily traffic volumes have leveled off at approximately 83% of traffic compared with 2019 levels. These volumes, while lower than the pre-March 2020 volumes, reflect the existing new normal daily traffic conditions. While there is limited comparable data available to assess peak-hour traffic conditions, it appears reasonable that existing peak-hour volumes would reflect new normal traffic conditions as well.

Recommendation

The current interim traffic count data collection policy will end on September 30, 2020. A new interim traffic count data collection and TIS acceptance policy with the following options shall apply as of October 1, 2020:

- **Option A. New Counts.**
 - As long as the county remains in Phase 2 (or advances to Phase 3) of the COVID-19 recovery plan, a TIS may use traffic counts collected on or after October 1, 2020 with the application of an adjustment factor to account for the Montgomery County

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Public School building closure and remote learning status. Should county public schools re-open for full in-person instruction, new traffic counts may be used without an adjustment factor and in accordance with the *2017 Local Area Transportation Review Guidelines*.

- The applicable adjustment factor will be determined by Montgomery Planning staff in advance of October 1.
 - This traffic count option will immediately cease to be available for transportation impact studies should the county revert to Phase 1 of the COVID-19 recovery plan.
 - Should the county fully reopen, new traffic counts may be used without an adjustment factor and in accordance with the *2017 Local Area Transportation Review Guidelines*, effective three months after the declaration of the county's open status.
- **Option B. Historical Counts.** Transportation Impact Studies based on traffic counts collected before March 14, will be accepted as follows:
 - Existing counts collected within a year of the application's 65-day deadline can be used in a TIS without adjustment.
 - Existing counts collected between one and three years prior to the application's 65-day deadline may only be used if modified by a growth factor. The growth factor must be developed based on the past ten-year historical traffic volume data for the nearest SHA roadway. This growth rate should be approved by the Planning Department in coordination with the Development Review Committee prior to acceptance of the TIS.
 - Traffic counts collected more than three years earlier than the application's 65-day deadline will not be accepted and may not be used to assess the finding of Adequate Public Facilities.

Combinations of the two options will be accepted as each is allowed, but under no circumstance will traffic counts collected between March 14 and September 30, 2020 be accepted.

This policy will be re-evaluated during the summer of 2021, or earlier if deemed necessary.