

Date of Hearing: May 13, 2026

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Buffy Wicks, Chair

AB 2059 (Wilson) – As Amended April 22, 2026

Policy Committee: Natural Resources

Vote: 14 - 0

Urgency: No

State Mandated Local Program: Yes

Reimbursable: No

**SUMMARY:**

This bill provides that, for purposes of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), a transportation project is presumed to have a less-than-significant transportation impact as determined by the vehicle-miles-traveled (VMT) metric if at least 80% of the project lies within one or more “nonmetropolitan counties”.

In addition, this bill:

- 1) Provides that the above provision does not apply to a transportation project that adds one or more general purpose lanes to the state highway system unless there is a demonstrated safety or evacuation need for the project.
- 2) Defines “demonstrated evacuation need,” “demonstrated safety need,” “nonmetropolitan county,” and “transportation project” for purposes of this bill.

**FISCAL EFFECT:**

- 1) The Office of Land Use and Climate Innovation (LCI) estimates a one-time General Fund cost of approximately \$75,000 to update its CEQA Guidelines to account for the changes proposed by this bill.
- 2) The Department of Transportation (Caltrans) anticipates minor and absorbable costs to update its guidelines and procedures. Typically, transportation projects satisfy their VMT mitigation obligations by contributing to, among other things, local or regional active transportation improvements, transit service enhancements, transit-oriented development, and transportation demand management programs. For Caltrans-led projects captured under this bill, Caltrans assumes the less-than-significant transportation impact presumption may result in indeterminate cost savings to the department from having to conduct less or no VMT mitigation for the project.

The Legislative Analyst’s Office recently warned of General Fund structural deficits of around \$35 billion per year in the 2027-28 fiscal year and ongoing.

**COMMENTS:**

- 1) **Purpose.** According to the author:

AB 2059 is a narrow, practical update to how transportation impacts in rural communities are analyzed under CEQA. In rural communities, travel distances are long, transit options are limited, and land use patterns are dispersed. Driving is not optional, it is a necessity. As a result, the standard VMT mitigation strategies like transit investments, trip reduction programs, mode shift are often infeasible or ineffective. The narrow exemption in AB 2059 will help ensure that important transportation projects move forward in a timely manner.

- 2) **Background.** According to the University of California, Berkeley Center for Law, Energy, and the Environment, under CEQA, government agencies and developers are required to mitigate, where feasible, the environmental impacts of new discretionary projects, including impacts to transportation. Traditionally, transportation impacts were evaluated in terms of level of service (LOS), which focuses on roadway congestion. SB 743 (Steinberg), Chapter 386, Statutes of 2013, called for a new transportation impact measure – VMT – that promotes greenhouse gas emission reduction and multimodal transportation. In 2018, LCI updated the CEQA guidelines to recommend VMT as the preferred impact measurement. VMT focuses on total vehicle trip-miles generated by a new project regardless of where they occur or how much traffic they cause. LCI’s CEQA Guidelines took effect in July 2020, and agencies are now required to analyze the transportation impacts of a project using a VMT metric instead of LOS.

As described in the Assembly Natural Resources Committee’s analysis of this bill, there are legitimate and unique challenges with respect to mitigating VMT in rural communities, where there may be a lack of practical alternatives to driving. These communities may be isolated from public transit, have little demand for development of multi-family affordable housing, and have weather, topography, or commute distances that make active transportation an unrealistic option.

Transportation California and a coalition of organizations in support of this bill argue the transition to VMT has proven difficult to implement in a way that consistently delivers meaningful outcomes. In many cases, the coalition argues, the existing approach is producing mitigation requirements that are infeasible, disproportionately costly, or only loosely connected to measurable VMT and greenhouse gas reductions, and “when mitigation is not feasible, projects are delayed, downsized, or abandoned altogether – outcomes that hurt Californians who want safe, efficient, and affordable transportation options.” The coalition writes that by establishing a presumption of less-than-significant transportation impact under the VMT metric for transportation projects where at least 80% of the project lies within one or more nonmetropolitan counties, this bill ensures that “mitigation remains a meaningful component of project delivery without overwhelming the projects themselves” and “allows agencies to balance mitigation investments with other strategies that reduce emissions, including system preservation, operational improvements, and multimodal enhancements.”

The Bay Area Council, the California Trucking Association, and a coalition of organizations in a support-if-amended position argue that while this bill takes an important step in addressing the disproportionate impacts of VMT mitigation in nonmetropolitan communities, challenges are not limited to those areas. The coalition asserts that agencies across suburban and urban regions “are also experiencing increased project costs, delivery delays, and uncertainty due to mitigation requirements that are often costly, difficult to implement, and

do not consistently result in measurable reductions in travel behavior.” These groups request that the bill be amended to “expand the application of VMT reform statewide.”

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