

DATE: April 23, 2020

SUBJECT: COVID-19 Traffic Data Guidance

TO: District Executives

FROM: T Jay Cunningham, P.E., Acting Director
Bureau of Maintenance and Operations



This Strike-off Letter provides interim guidance for traffic volumes and data collection for traffic studies in response to COVID-19. This guidance applies to the following:

- Transportation Impact Studies and Transportation Impact Assessments associated with Highway Occupancy Permits
- Transportation studies for projects on the public highway system, including regional planning studies
- Traffic studies relates to various types of traffic control (TE forms)
- Traffic signal timing analysis

The Highway Safety and Traffic Operations Division (HSTO) has analyzed traffic volumes since Governor Wolf began implementing orders on March 12, 2020. Closure of schools, non-life-sustaining businesses, and stay at home orders have resulted in significant decreases in traffic volumes. The rebound to pre-COVID traffic conditions may take months or even years, and the rebound will likely be on a regional or local basis. As such, **traffic counts collected after March 13, 2020 shall not be used to project future traffic volumes without applying adjustments using engineering judgment to account for business closures and stay at home orders.** The methodology should be approved in advance by the District Traffic Engineer or designee.

Traffic Counts

Transportation Studies are subject to the policy in Publication 282 (Appendix A) and the Design Manual Part 1 and 2 series, and the data collection plan should be approved as part of the scoping meeting application or project development. For projects with an approved scoping meeting application or scoping field view prior to March 13, 2020 but which did not collect traffic data prior to March 13, 2020, the engineer should prepare a data collection plan to supplement the scoping application to identify how traffic volumes will be collected.

Section 10.2 of Publication 46 addresses the use of engineering judgment for traffic studies to determine the appropriate time during which to conduct a traffic count.

Following are some resources to identify appropriate factors to adjust traffic volumes:

- TIRe (<https://gis.penndot.gov/TIRe>): hourly count data from permanent and portable count stations can be obtained by clicking on the station and then choosing “Open Reports” from the pop-up box. Hourly data can be obtained by clicking on available dates in the next screen.

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- Planning partner data, including historical traffic counts and regional travel demand models.
- Third-party vendor data, with origin-destination information prior to March 13, 2020, can be used to estimate percentages of turning movements.
- Recent traffic counts (2014 or newer) conducted at the subject location or nearby.
- Traffic data contain within other transportation studies in the same geographic area, including traffic counts and traffic projections for developments constructed after the collection of data.
- Trips for facilities temporarily closed, including, but not limited to non-life-sustaining businesses and schools, may be estimated using the ITE Trip Generation manual.

Field traffic data collection shall be restricted in accordance with the Governor's orders and any additional PennDOT restrictions, as applicable.

Traffic Volume Projections

Due to uncertainty regarding the long-term economic impacts of COVID-19 and the corresponding impacts to traffic demand, engineering judgment is necessary for the application of growth factors to project future traffic volumes. Per regular policy, engineers should generally continue to use 5-year and 20-year design horizons for basis of HOP and conventional projects respectively, unless project-specific conditions warrant otherwise.

Future Evaluation

Projects analyzed using adjusted traffic volumes should be reevaluated after all of the Governor's restrictions are lifted.

To prevent delays in the review of HOP applications, Districts may accept post-development studies as part of the mitigation when there is confidence in available data that geometric improvements and/or modification to the selection of intersection traffic control are not required. The requirements for the post-development study shall be identified as conditions of the HOP. Post-development studies shall be limited to establishing proper traffic signal timing and may not be used to require additional geometric improvements. The applicant shall be responsible for implementing any traffic signal timing changes identified as part of the post-development study. Post-development studies should not be completed until at least six months after the Governor's restrictions are lifted, or six months after full build-out of the development, whichever is later.

To assist with the post-development study and on-going traffic signal operations, Districts should encourage mitigation strategies including interconnection of impacted signals to the Commonwealth network with controllers compatible with the Department's Unified Command and Control software and detection configured to support collection of Automated Traffic Signal Performance Measures.

This interim guidance shall remain in effect until rescinded.

Should you have any questions or require additional information, please contact Stephen Gault, P.E., PTOE, Chief, TSMO Arterials and Planning Section, at 717.787.6988.

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