



DEPARTMENT OF CITY PLANNING Executive Office

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TO: Interested Parties
Department of City Planning Staff

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SUBJECT: **METHODOLOGY FOR DETERMINING BUS TRANSIT SERVICE LEVELS;
IMPLEMENTATION OF RAPID BUS PROVISIONS OF THE TRANSIT
ORIENTED COMMUNITIES PROGRAM**

This memo provides additional information on how the City of Los Angeles verifies several transit-related definitions that originate from state law. The affected terms include Major Transit Stop (MTS), and High-Quality Transit Corridor (HQTC). These terms are used to determine inclusion within a Transit Priority Area (TPA) and High-Quality Transit Corridor Area (HQTA)¹ and are within state and local affordable housing incentive programs (i.e., Density Bonus and Transit Oriented Communities (TOC)), as well as for the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and various other parts of state and local law.

Statutory Definitions

California statute defines Major Transit Stop, Transit Priority Area and High-Quality Transit Corridor as follows.

"Major transit stop" means a site containing an existing rail transit station, a ferry terminal served by either a bus or rail transit service, or the intersection of two or more major bus routes with a frequency of service interval of 15 minutes or less during the morning and afternoon peak commute periods. (CA Pub. Res. Code § 21064.3)

A *major transit stop* is as defined in Section 21064.3, except that, for purposes of this section, it also includes major transit stops that are included in the applicable regional transportation plan. (CA Pub. Res. Code § 21155(b))

Transit Priority Area means an area within one-half mile of a major transit stop that is existing or planned, if the planned stop is scheduled to be completed within the planning horizon included in a Transportation Improvement Program or applicable regional transportation plan. (CA Pub. Res. Code § 20199)

¹ Reference the August 19, 2020 "Transit Service During the COVID-19 Pandemic" memo for an explanation of the various definitions.

For purposes of this section, a *high-quality transit corridor* means a corridor with fixed route bus service with service intervals no longer than 15 minutes during peak commute hours. A project shall be considered to be within one-half mile of a *major transit stop* or *high-quality transit corridor* if all parcels within the project have no more than 25 percent of their area farther than one-half mile from the stop or corridor and if not more than 10 percent of the residential units or 100 units, whichever is less, in the project are farther than one-half mile from the stop or corridor. (CA Pub. Res. Code § 21155(b))

Transit Service Methodology

The current methodology used by City Planning to determine qualifying *major transit stops*, *transit priority areas* and *high-quality transit stops* is described in the TOC Guidelines, which is used to implement the TOC Program. Appendix A of the TOC Guidelines refers to the methodology used by City Planning as “SCAG and OPR Methodology.” This was an acknowledgement that City Planning intended to be consistent with the methodology used by the Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG), which had been developed in consultation with the CA Office of Planning and Research (OPR), local transit agencies and other entities. SCAG is also the responsible agency for developing the regional transportation plan (e.g., Connect SoCal) that is identified in the *major transit stop* definition.

SCAG updates its assessment of existing major transit stops and other related transit definitions with the adoption of a new Regional Transportation Plan Sustainable Communities Strategy (RTP/SCS) every four years. In 2019, SCAG updated their methodology based on input from their Regional Transit Technical Advisory Committee (RTTAC), as well as consultation with local agencies, other large metropolitan planning organizations in California, and the OPR. Since this time, the City has inadvertently fallen out of alignment with the SCAG methodology on two aspects of the updated methodology, described below.

Directional Frequency - State law does not specify whether a 15-minute bus service interval is required in both directions in both the AM and PM peak periods. In 2019, SCAG received feedback from regional transit operators stating that they often operate heavier service on a particular corridor going one way or another based on service demands (e.g., to get to a job center in the AM and to residential areas in the PM). Based on this input, and after consultation with other metropolitan planning organizations, SCAG allows service intervals in one direction during each peak period to satisfy the 15-minute bus service requirement.

Family Lines - State law does not specify that 15-minute determinations are limited to individual bus lines, and instead uses the term “bus routes.” Some bus operators run separate but overlapping local and rapid bus routes along a given corridor. On these corridors, transit riders typically board the first bus available, whether it be a local, express, or BRT line. In some cases, the individual bus routes may not individually meet the 15-minute thresholds. Based on input from transit operators, it was determined that there are certain corridors where overlapping “line families,” or combinations of local/bus rapid transit (BRT) lines that run along a corridor, are intended to function as one bus route. Therefore, SCAG now allows the frequencies for these line families on local/BRT corridors to be combined to calculate the route service intervals.

The Department of City Planning will utilize the SCAG methodology on these issues effective immediately from the date of this memo. It is important to note that, even with the intent to align methodologies, the maps used by SCAG and the City are likely to differ at most points in time. This is because SCAG's maps reflect the existing transit services levels observed at a point in time during the "base year" of the RTP/SCS, which is typically 2-3 years before plan adoption, as well as planned stops.

Minor Differences in *Major Transit Stop* Measurement for Density Bonus and TOC

State Density Bonus law (Government Code § 65915) was recently amended through AB 2345 (2020) to modify how one-half mile from a *major transit stop* is measured for the purposes of certain parking incentives and incentives for 100% affordable housing using the program. It states:

A housing development project is "located within one-half mile of a major transit stop" if any point on property of the proposed development is within a half mile distance of any point on the property on which a major transit stop is located, including any parking lot owned by the transit authority or other local agency operating the major transit stop (§ 65915(o)(3))."

This modification applies only to Density Bonus projects. Density Bonus applicants utilizing this measurement should indicate it on the Transit Verification Form or Affordable Housing Referral Form, and the distance measurement will be verified by staff in the Affordable Housing Services Section.

Implementation of the Rapid Bus Provisions of the TOC Program

Related but separate from the methodology issues for the state definitions described above, is a question related to the local methodology used as part of the TOC Program. The TOC Guidelines utilized to implement the TOC Program apply to areas located within one-half mile of a Major Transit Stop (MTS). The TOC Guidelines create unique incentives depending on which specific TOC Tier (1-4) the property qualifies. TOC Tiers are based on the distance between a lot and a MTS, as well as the type of MTS. Chart 1 in the TOC Guidelines lists five types of Major Transit Stops, each with their own distance requirements from different types of transit to qualify for different Tiers. For three types of MTS, Chart 1 makes a distinction between "Regular Buses" and Rapid Buses, which is defined in the Chart 1 notes. The notation for Regular Buses specifies that they meet the 15-minute standard, while the Rapid Bus definition TOC Guidelines does not. The intent is that a Rapid Bus has important qualifications that merit an increase in Tier status, independent of the 15-minute threshold, which has already been established by the MTS designation. The Department has always administered the Guidelines in this manner.

The March 25, 2021 Department memo titled "[Metro NextGen; Rapid Bus Definitions](#)" provided information on the way the Department is interpreting the definition of Rapid Bus in relation to the changes made as part of Metro's 2021 NextGen Bus Plan for TOC as well as Density Bonus (LAMC 12.22 A.25). In summary, Metro NextGen Bus Lines that replaced a Rapid Bus Line have been determined to meet the definition of Rapid Bus, as listed in the 2021 memo². This memo remains valid; however, any listed lines must continue to meet the 15-minute thresholds in state law to qualify for the terms covered by this memo.

² Reference the March 25, 2021 Metro NextGen Rapid Bus Definitions memo for an explanation of the various definitions.

It is important to note that while a planned intersection may qualify as a MTS for purposes of AB 2097, the necessary transit data may not be available for staff to confirm and determine TOC eligibility. For purposes of determining TOC eligibility and TOC Tiers, either a TOC Tier Verification or TOC Referral Form will continue to be required for all TOC projects.

Interested parties are encouraged to continue to contact City Planning's Affordable Housing Services Section at planning.priorityhousing@lacity.org to confirm eligibility for affordable housing programs.