



Tackling transportation emissions in California — or ignoring them

By Melanie Curry, *StreetsBlog Cal*, March 5, 2020

“Two California Senate committees, Transportation and Environmental Quality, held a hearing [March 4, 2020] to talk about ‘Putting the Brakes on California’s Rising Transportation Emissions.’

“Politics and urgency

“California has been grappling with the need to lower greenhouse gas emissions for years but, at least in terms of transportation, has made little progress.

“That’s in part because until recently few leaders [have been willing to say that Californians need to cut down on driving](#).

“Environmental Quality Committee Chair Ben Allen (D-Santa Monica), California State Transportation Agency Secretary David Kim, Air Resources Board Chair Mary Nichols, and ... Senator [Brian] Dahle ... all noted it is one of the key things California needs to tackle.

“But Transportation Committee Chair Jim Beall (D-Campbell) showed there is still a lot of work to do to educate people.

“‘[Vehicle Miles Traveled] is one way to look at it,’ he said. ‘But we should also look at congestion, at how much time it takes to get somewhere. If a car is running longer, [it stands to reason it] would be polluting more, and also: how much gas it uses ... I would even argue that electric cars pollute because more people are stuck in congestion,’ he said.

“Electrify everything, but reduce VMT too

“Secretary Kim and Chair Nichols spoke of the many, multi-pronged efforts being undertaken by the state to tackle transportation emissions, the main one being electrifying everything as quickly as possible.

“‘Electrification has been key to state thinking and regulatory activities in this area,’ said Nichols. Although the state has goals to require that all new vehicles sold in the state be electric by 2045, ‘we need to have *all* passenger vehicles on the road be zero-emission by 2045,’ she said. ‘And we’re obviously a very long way from that goal right now.’

“The only way to get there is to reduce driving. ‘We need to reduce VMT per capita,’ Nichols said. ‘Hopefully it would be done in a painless way, and we can generate funding to soften the blow for those who would be excessively burdened,’ she added.

“Secretary Kim also highlighted electrification as a partial solution. ‘Promoting greater use of EVs is clearly a key strategy,’ he said. ‘But also: reducing VMT and encouraging mode



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shift. We need to have safe, accessible, affordable, reliable, and frequent ways of traveling. The more people walk, bike, and use shared mobility including transit, the better it will be for everyone.'

"The trends, however, are going in the wrong direction, with driving going up and transit use declining, and little shift in biking and walking modes.

"Secretary Kim said that California State Transportation Agency (CalSTA) is focusing on what it can do to at the state level to help increase transit ridership, expand bike and walk infrastructure, and promote 'the right kind of development to help people reduce driving [by] making sure transportation can support affordable infill housing.'

"CalSTA is also, he said, 'focusing on transportation demand management over highway expansions.'"

For more detailed coverage of the California Senate hearing on transportation emissions, [read the full article here](#). And Susan L. Handy, Professor of Environmental Science and Policy at UC Davis, describes two key policy steps the state can take to meet transportation emissions reductions goals.