



Colorado's New Greenhouse Gas Standard for Transportation Planning

OVERVIEW

The Colorado Transportation Commission has approved a new standard to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from the transportation sector, improve air quality, reduce smog and provide more travel options. The standard requires CDOT and the state's five metropolitan planning organizations to determine the total greenhouse emissions expected from future transportation projects and reduce emissions by set amounts. This standard recognizes that the projects we build have an impact on how Coloradans travel and will help bring about a transportation system that provides more choices for travelers across the state.

KEY PROVISIONS OF THE NEW STANDARD

- Requires CDOT and the state's five metropolitan planning agencies to create transportation plans that provide more travel choices, resulting in reduced GHG emissions. The agencies must use sophisticated travel models to make this determination for different years in the future, and the emission goals differ for each agency and metro region.
- The modeling applies to "regionally significant projects," which are those projects that result in a fundamental change to the way people travel (e.g. new highway lanes).
- If an agency can't meet the greenhouse gas reduction levels, it can choose one or more mitigation measures as needed to meet the standard. These can include more public transit, more walking and bicycle trails, more medium- and heavy-duty electric vehicle charging stations, cleaner construction policies, carpool programs and smarter land use policies.
- If an agency still can't meet its greenhouse gas reduction goals even after using mitigation measures, the Colorado Transportation Commission can designate that specific funding streams for an agency be spent on mitigation efforts.
- The commission can also issue waivers for certain projects despite their potential impact on emissions, such as those needed for safety reasons.

BENEFITS AND BACKGROUND

The standard is one of several transportation strategies identified in the state's [Greenhouse Gas Pollution Reduction Roadmap](#) and is a key requirement established in the 2021 state transportation funding bill (SB21-260). The standard builds on the state's effort to rapidly deploy electric vehicles by encouraging a future transportation system that improves transit, biking and walking options.

The benefits from this standard are equivalent to burning 169 million fewer gallons of gasoline or taking approximately 300,000 cars off the road for a year. These benefits directly improve air quality by also reducing the pollutants that cause ozone and smog.



TOTAL SOCIAL BENEFITS:



The planning standard is expected to generate billions in economic benefits for both members of the general public and for Colorado businesses. The most substantial benefits are from fewer crashes and lower vehicle operating costs, resulting from reduced vehicle miles traveled. But many other benefits would be seen, including decreased fuel and maintenance costs for businesses and individuals and reduced vehicle ownership costs for things such as depreciation, insurance, license and registration fees and finance charges. Further, the standard is likely to spur greater downtown and main street revitalization as well as increased access to jobs.

TRAVELERS:



Travelers will benefit from reductions in vehicle operating costs as a result of expanded travel options (e.g., transit service, tele-commuting, travel, walking and bicycling), travel time savings and the need to use personal vehicles less. The standard will also reduce economic costs associated with carbon emissions, air pollution, motor vehicle crashes (road safety) and the health consequences of physical inactivity.

TOWNS AND CITIES:



Colorado's new greenhouse gas standard will help our state's largest communities reduce their emissions while increasing sustainable, efficient forms of transportation and promoting healthy lifestyles. The rule will encourage communities to increase travel options such as transit, carpooling, bicycling and first- and last-mile links.

DISPROPORTIONATELY IMPACTED COMMUNITIES:



The standard requires CDOT's statewide transportation plan to include an analysis of impacts on disproportionately impacted communities and requires CDOT to exchange information with, increase involvement in and consider the transportation needs of these communities throughout the transportation planning process. Further, the standard sets up a process to encourage mitigation measures to benefit disproportionately impacted communities.

BUSINESSES:



Businesses are also expected to benefit through congestion reduction that saves travel time for "on-the-clock" business travel and reduced health care costs for employees as a result of reduced air pollution, motor vehicle crashes and physical inactivity. They may also experience increased worker retention and satisfaction as a result of employees having expanded commute or work-from-home options. Also, policies that facilitate and reward downtown density tend to have a markedly positive impact on "main street" small businesses such as restaurants and locally owned retail.

COLORADANS IN GENERAL:



All Coloradans will benefit from the new standard in the form of climate change mitigation and cleaner air. Meanwhile, for the nearly 90% of Coloradans who live in urban areas, the standard also means fewer car crashes, savings in fuel and car ownership, more options for bicycling and walking and revitalized streetscapes.

