

WHAT IS A TRAFFIC IMPACT STUDY AND WHEN IS ONE NEEDED?

A PRIMER FOR ELECTED OFFICIALS AS THEY CONSIDER APPROVING SITE PLANS

Site planning is an in-depth analysis of a proposed development, one that integrates the building, site circulation, parking and access to the public roadway system. Transportation aspects of site planning include, but are not limited to, analysis of the traffic impacts of the development, the adequacy of the access drives and the suitability of the on-site circulation and parking.

Developers and their consultants, state highway agencies, municipalities, planning agencies, elected officials and the general public all have significant roles and interests in the site planning process. While developers want to have a successful and financially sound development, they also have significant responsibility to ensure the public's health, safety and welfare at their particular site.



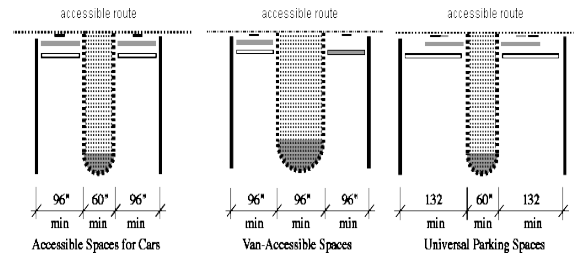
Public officials have the responsibility to manage the development process. The site plan review and the approval process adopted by public agencies provide a mechanism to protect public health, safety and welfare. Appropriately written ordinances, regulations, policies and/or guidelines are the most effective

ways of addressing off-site and on-site traffic and other transportation aspects of any major land development or redevelopment.

The site planning process should include:

- A Financial Feasibility Study to determine the demographic and geographic suitability of the project.
- A Traffic Impact Study (TIS) to estimate site-generated traffic volumes and assess its impact on the public street system. A TIS also identifies on-site and off-site improvements that might be needed as a result of the development.
- A Site Plan Review that considers the relationship of the development to the surrounding roadway network, the location and design, interconnection and cross-access with adjacent properties, on-site circulation and parking. This review also should consider a variety of other site plan details including drainage, landscaping, utility locations, fire protection, loading docks and solid waste collection.

Because building location, on-site circulation and access are highly interrelated, traffic-related issues should be identified early on, allowing better use of the site and the adjacent streets and better planning for access and on-site circulation and parking. A preliminary traffic study prepared in conjunction with the market study will help avoid traffic problems that may limit the financial success of a proposed development. It is appropriate to begin the site planning and design process with tentative location of the buildings, preliminary layout of the parking spaces and identification of the access locations.



When Is a TIS needed?

Many local governments have established guidelines, policies and/or ordinances that govern their site development and review process. Usually the requirement to perform a Traffic Impact Study is based on number of trips generated by the site, type and size of the development, and other development or area characteristics. Generally, the suggested baseline for requiring a TIS is when a development generates 100 new trips to the adjacent street network during the peak hour of the adjacent street traffic.

The content of a TIS varies depending upon the complexity of the proposed development. Not all proposed developments will need a full TIS. Depending on the type and size of development, the TIS can range from a cursory review and letter of opinion from a qualified professional to a comprehensive analysis and report that includes the detailed study of the development, the areawide transportation system and other approved or planned developments in the vicinity of the proposed development.

Connecticut Office of the State Traffic Administration – Major Traffic Generators

Pursuant to Sections 14-311 and 14-311c of the Connecticut General Statutes, major traffic generators (MTG) are regulated as to their traffic impact on the state highway system in Connecticut by the Office of the State Traffic Administration (OSTA). An MTG is defined by Section 14-312-1 of the OSTA regulations as any development of 100,000 square feet or more of gross floor area or 200 or more parking spaces. The OSTA authority under these statutes applies to new MTGs as well as expansions or land use changes to those already in existence. However, entirely residential developments of 100 units or less are exempt from OSTA regulation under these statutes. The regulation of MTGs by the OSTA is accomplished via either an Administrative Decision (AD) or certification process (Certificate). For more information about the CT State Traffic Administration, please visit: www.ct.gov/dot/osta

Who Should Conduct a TIS?

A TIS should be prepared under the supervision of a qualified and experienced transportation professional who has specific training in traffic and transportation engineering and planning, and preferably with several years of experience with TIS preparation. In addition, all transportation operations and design work stipulated in the TIS recommendations should be

completed under the supervision of a qualified and experienced professional engineer in conformance with state and local professional requirements. Most review agencies require that the TIS report be sealed and signed by a registered Professional Engineer (PE) or preferably a certified Professional Traffic Operations Engineer (PTOE), who is a professional engineer with specific expertise in transportation and traffic engineering.

Regardless of whether your community has a requirement for a professional's seal on the TIS report, detailed reviews should be carried out by individuals with adequate training and experience in traffic and transportation engineering and planning. In cases where multiple transportation agencies are affected by the proposed development, all such agencies should be offered an opportunity to review the TIS.

Although study preparers and reviewers sometimes will have different objectives and perspectives, all parties involved in the process should adhere to established engineering ethics and all analyses and reviews should be conducted in an objective and professional manner.

COMMON USES FOR TIS REPORTS

To provide developers or designers with recommendations regarding site selection, site transportation planning and traffic impacts.

To assist public agencies in reviewing the attributes of proposed developments in conjunction with requests for annexation, land subdivision, zoning changes, building permits or other development reviews.

To establish or negotiate mitigation requirements where off-site impacts require improvements beyond those otherwise needed. Such reports also have been used by public agencies as the basis of levying impact fees or assessing developer contributions to roadway facility improvements.

What is In a TIS report?

A TIS report should, at the minimum, achieve the following:

- State the purpose and scope of the report and identify the study area of the project.
- State all assumptions used in analysis and make reference to and/or include all supporting documents used to prepare the report.
- Describe, in detail, proposed land use type(s) and size(s).
- Identify number, location and type of proposed access drive(s) to the development site.
- Evaluate intersection sight line distances from proposed driveways.
- Provide a detailed summary of data collection efforts and results.
- Estimate number of trips generated by the development site.
- Identify most critical analysis period.
- Determine anticipated directional distribution of site-generated traffic.
- Assign site traffic at intersections including through and turning movements.
- Identify internal circulation of site traffic and parking.
- Identify need for turning lanes or bypass options at proposed driveway location(s).
- Analyze traffic control warrants if needed.
- Determine anticipated future non-site (background) traffic volumes.
- Identify other “nearby approved” developments within the study area.
- Evaluate “existing + site + nearby approved developments” traffic operating conditions to assess cumulative impact of traffic for pre-specified target year.
- Recommend on-site and/or off-site road improvements for each traffic conditions separately (i.e. “existing”, “existing + site”, “existing + site + nearby approved developments”, and “future long-term”).
- Address percent contribution to off-site road improvements by individual development sites (i.e. proposed and other nearby development site) based on number of new trips each site generates and adds to adjacent street network, primarily during critical peak hour.
- Include findings and recommendations using nontechnical jargon to help public officials with their decision-making.

A FEW WORDS OF CAUTION

A TIS should NOT:

- Include cost estimates for needed improvements.
- Attempt to assign responsibilities for needed improvements.
- Discuss economic benefits of proposed developments.
- Include any information whatsoever regarding the highest and best use, or market value of the subject property.
- Be subjective.

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