# Driving Miss Delay: Measure VKT Instead

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| What we measure matters. It reveals what we value most and, more importantly, dictates what we build and shapes our communities. Many of the changes to streets in New Zealand happen not as planned projects, but in reaction to new development. Many of those reactive changes add traffic lanes and widen intersections, undermining policy intentions to create more efficient and sustainable journeys. This perpetuation of car-centric planning is due in part because we measure the delays to general traffic, known as level of service (LOS), as an impact of new developments. This approach favours low-density, greenfield developments and forces mitigations that expand capacity for driving. Increasing traffic capacity generates more congestion and GHG emissions in the long run via induced demand and locks in car dependency by making it more difficult to access other modes. But there is another way. California recently overhauled their environmental assessment process to identify the induced driving itself as the environmental impact by measuring vehicle-kilometres travelled (VKT) instead of LOS. This change will favour developments and mitigation measures that reduce the need to drive and provide more choice of how people get around rather than simply building more roads. LOS-less Planning: VKT for Equitable Outcomes won ‘Best Research Paper’ at last year’s National Conference. This presentation builds off that paper with additional research to better understand:* How increasing traffic capacity induces driving and creates congestion and increases GHG emissions
* New ways councils could evaluate projects in alignment with the Resource Management Act (RMA) to provide more resilient and efficient communities with a lower economic and environmental price tag
* How the new National Policy Statement on Urban Development 2020 supports this concept.
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