

CITY OF PALM DESERT STAFF REPORT

MEETING DATE: November 13, 2025

PREPARED BY: Carlos Flores, AICP, Deputy Director of Development Services

SUBJECT: APPROVE AN ADDENDUM TO THE GENERAL PLAN ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT, AN UPDATED MOBILITY ELEMENT OF THE GENERAL PLAN, AND UPDATED TRANSPORTATION STUDY GUIDELINES

RECOMMENDATION:

1. Hold a public hearing and adopt a Resolution entitled “A RESOLUTION OF THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PALM DESERT, CALIFORNIA, APPROVING AN ADDENDUM TO THE CITY GENERAL PLAN ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT AND APPROVING A GENERAL PLAN AMENDMENT UPDATING THE MOBILITY (CIRCULATION) ELEMENT OF THE GENERAL PLAN.”
2. Hold a public hearing and adopt a Resolution entitled “A RESOLUTION OF THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PALM DESERT, CALIFORNIA, APPROVING UPDATED TRANSPORTATION STUDY GUIDELINES, INCLUDING THRESHOLDS OF SIGNIFICANCE, FOR LAND USE AND TRANSPORTATION PROJECTS IN THE CITY OF PALM DESERT AND FINDING THE PROJECT NOT SUBJECT TO THE CALIFORNIA ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY ACT.”

BACKGROUND/ANALYSIS:

California state law requires all cities and counties to adopt a general plan, a long-range planning document “for the physical development of the county, or city, and any land outside its boundaries which in the planning agency’s judgment bears relation to its planning” (Gov. Code §65300). The Mobility Element, also known as a Circulation Element, is a mandatory element of a general plan and identifies the general location and extent of existing and proposed major thoroughfares, transportation routes, terminals, and other local public utilities and facilities.

The City of Palm Desert adopted its current general plan, including the mobility element, on November 10, 2016, by Resolution No. 2016-87. On September 26, 2019, the City Council adopted Council Resolution No. 2019-76a which approved an amendment to the Circulation Element to reclassify Painters Path from a “Local Street” to an “Enhanced Secondary Roadway” for the CV Link Project.

Since this adoption, several state policies and regulations have been implemented that affect transportation planning, including:

- California Senate Bill (SB) 932: requires that counties and cities identify high-injury streets and intersections in its General Plan. This bill was passed to improve the safety of all road users, including bicyclists, pedestrians, and other active transportation users.

City of Palm Desert
Mobility (Circulation) Element and Transportation Guidelines Update

- SB 743: Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT) as the new California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) metric for transportation impacts.
- SB 330 / SB 35: Housing streamlining and consistency provisions. To streamline the housing approval process without impacting the City's circulation network, the Mobility Element includes maximum cross section widths for each roadway classification to ensure adequate right-of-way is reserved for future roadway improvements.

Additionally, the Element requires updates to ensure clarity, objectivity, internal consistency, and alignment with the City's adopted Active Transportation Plan.

On August 25, 2022, the Council adopted Resolution No. 2022-74, approving the County of Riverside Transportation Study Guidelines for Level of Service (LOS) and VMT evaluation. These guidelines ensure local compliance with SB 743, which shifted CEQA transportation impact analysis from LOS to VMT-based metrics.

On July 11, 2024, the City entered into a contract with Fehr & Peers (Contract No. C48060) to prepare an update to the Mobility Element and new City-specific Transportation Study Guidelines (Guidelines). The update ensures consistency with state law, the Active Transportation Plan, transit planning, and the City's Capital Improvement Program. Fehr & Peers was selected for its familiarity with Palm Desert, the County of Riverside, and CVAG, having prepared the original 2016 General Plan traffic analysis. The City put together a cross departmental Technical Advisory Committee (consisting of representatives of Planning, Land Development, Public Works, Capital Projects, Civil Engineering, Traffic Engineer, and a VMT Consultant to work with Fehr and Peers and review all documents throughout drafting.

The Consultant provided several updates on the Circulation Element and Guidelines Update (Project) to the City Council as follows:

- February 13, 2025, City Council Study Session: Consultant provided an overview and update on the Circulation Element, including covering five (5) key topics: Active Transportation, Safety, Roadway Design Standards, Traffic Congestion, California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), and Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT).
- June 26, 2025, City Council Study Session: Direction given to the Consultant to include the Portola Avenue/Interstate-10 Interchange to the project.
- September 5, 2025, Active Transportation Program (ATP) Sub-Committee: Review and direction on proposed maps, policies, and programs.
- September 25, 2025, City Council Study Session: Consultant provided an update on policies and proposed maps.

City staff is recommending City Council approve the following three items:

- 1) An Addendum to the General Plan EIR
- 2) Update to the Mobility (Circulation) Element
- 3) City specific Transportation Study Guidelines

Project Description:

Mobility Element

The Consultant has prepared a comprehensive update to the General Plan Mobility Element for consideration (Attachment 1, Exhibit B). Adoption of this update would replace the existing 2016 Mobility Element in its entirety. The updated Mobility Element establishes a framework for a safe, efficient, and sustainable multimodal transportation system serving residents, businesses, and visitors through policies that emphasize creating livable streets for all users, reducing traffic-related fatalities and injuries, expanding multimodal travel options, and resilient infrastructure.

The Mobility Element is broken down into the following sections:

- Overview
- Circulation Network
- Transportation Performance Metrics
- Safety
- Goals and Policies

Overview

This section provides the background, vision statement, statutory requirements, and context of the Mobility Element. The Statutory Requirements outlines the updated state legislation that is incorporated into the Mobility Element, including: Assembly Bill (AB) 1358 (Complete Streets Act), SB 375 (Sustainable Communities and Climate Protection Act), SB 743 (VMT), SB 932 (Plan for the Future Bill), SB 330 (Housing Crisis Act), AB 98 (Truck Routes), and AB 3177 (Mitigation Fee Act).


Circulation Network

The City's circulation network includes the roadway network and associated roadway classifications, the bicycle and golf cart network, and the truck route network. The following are the proposed Roadway Classifications: Enhanced Arterial, Vehicle Oriented Arterial, Balanced Arterial, Enhanced Secondary Roadway, Secondary Roadway, Downtown Collector Street, Collector Street, El Paseo, and Specific Plan Roadway. Each classification is paired with a street segment exhibit, as shown in Exhibit 1:

Exhibit 1 – Vehicle Oriented Arterial Street Segment

Vehicle Oriented Arterial

Auto	Transit	Freight	Bike/ Golf Cart	Pedestrian
Prioritized	Allowed	Prioritized	Allowed	Allowed



Max ROW	160'
Access Management	Encourage driveway consolidation and manage turns
Travel Lanes	Three in each direction (11')
Median	Raised (w/ turn lanes) (14' typical)
Bicycle Facilities	Class II Buffered Bike Lanes (6' + 3' buffer) and/or Shared Sidewalk (10')
Golf Cart Facilities	Meandering Sidewalk (20' total width)
Pedestrian Facilities	Meandering Sidewalk (20' total width)
Parking	Not Allowed

This section also provides exhibits for the City’s Bicycle and Golf Cart Network and Truck Route network to establish clear transportation networks for all modes of transportation.

Transportation Performance Metrics

Consistent with CEQA and SB 743, transportation impacts are now evaluated using Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT) instead of Level of Service (LOS). The project also includes updated Transportation Study Guidelines and a City VMT Policy. While VMT is used for CEQA analysis, LOS remains a local planning tool to manage congestion and roadway operations. The City aims to maintain LOS D or better during peak hours, with LOS E acceptable in the City Center to encourage multimodal travel.

Safety

Building on the City’s Vision Zero Action Plan, the Mobility Element advances comprehensive goals, policies, and actions that address roadway safety holistically, including an exhibit of a High Injury Network.

Goals and Policies

The Mobility Element establishes ten (10) goals and fifty-four (54) policies organized around the following topics: Livable Streets, Safe Transportation System, Pedestrian Facilities, Bicycle Networks, Transit Facilities, Goods Movement, Parking, Sustainable Transportation, Transportation Innovation, and Regional Coordination.

Transportation Study Guidelines

The Consultant prepared updated Guidelines to replace use of the County Guidelines. The purpose of these Guidelines is to provide specifications related to methodologies, tools, and other key assumptions that should be considered for both VMT assessment and LOS assessment when evaluating projects in the City of Palm Desert. Consistent with SB 743, CEQA transportation impacts must be identified using VMT as the preferred metric. These Guidelines would be used for private and public development project moving forward.

CEQA implementation guidelines published by the Governor's Office of Land Use and Climate Innovation (LCI) (and formerly known as the Office of Planning and Research or OPR) state that local agencies are encouraged to formally adopt significance thresholds that are used to determine the significance of environmental impacts. These guidelines list the City's significance thresholds, which are in line with recommendations from the state and intend to improve the efficiency of the transportation system.

The Guidelines are organized in the following six (6) sections:

- 1) Introduction: Introduces the intent, context, and purpose of the Guidelines
- 2) City of Palm Desert Thresholds: outlines the adopted thresholds used by the City to determine CEQA transportation impacts and non-CEQA LOS deficiencies.
- 3) Analysis Scoping Process: summarizes the process for communicating with the City to determine the appropriate analysis scope and procedures. This section also documents when a transportation study is required.
- 4) VMT Analysis – CEQA Assessment: details the preferred methodology for analyzing VMT generated by a project. This includes screening criteria, methodology for non-screened projects, and potential mitigation.
- 5) Section 5: LOS Analysis – Non-CEQA Assessment: describes the preferred methodology for analyzing LOS deficiencies at intersections and along roadway segments. This section includes procedures for analysis and improvements to address LOS deficiencies.
- 6) Section 6: Safety and Multimodal Analysis – Non-CEQA Assessment: describes the preferred methodology for evaluating potential safety deficiencies and addresses multi-modal accessibility to a Project.

Environmental Assessment/Environmental Review:

Pursuant to the requirements of the CEQA, the State Guidelines for Implementation of CEQA (State CEQA Guidelines), and the City of Palm Desert CEQA Implementation Requirements, the City of Palm Desert Development Services Department prepared an Addendum to the City's 2016 certified Environmental Impact Report (EIR) (SCH #2015081020) adopted via City Council Resolution No. 2016-86 that determined there is no substantial evidence that the Amendment would result in significant environmental impacts not previously studied in the EIR and accordingly, the Amendment would not result in any conditions listed identified in CEQA Guidelines, Section 15162. The draft Addendum can be found as Exhibit A to Attachment 1.

Public Notice:

Public notice was conducted for the November 18, 2025, regular meeting of the Planning Commission consistent with PDMC § 25.60.060. A public hearing notice was published in The Desert Sun on October 7, 2025, at least 10 days prior to the hearing date.

Legal Review:

This report has been reviewed by the City Attorney's Office.

Planning Commission Recommendation:

On November 18, 2025, the Planning Commission held a public hearing and adopted Planning Commission Resolution 2908, which recommended that the City Council approve the proposed project.

FINANCIAL IMPACT: None.

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Draft Resolution EIR and Mobility Element
 - a. Exhibit A EIR Addendum
 - b. Exhibit B Mobility Element
2. Draft Resolution Transportation Study Guidelines
 - a. Exhibit A Transportation Study Guidelines
3. Public Hearing Notice
4. VMT Analysis