

# Traffic Mitigation and Developers

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In a growing number of jurisdictions, concern about mounting traffic congestion has led to a new brand of initiatives. Known as “traffic mitigation” or “demand management,” these initiatives aim to reduce peak hour traffic in congested suburban areas by encouraging the use of alternative transportation modes and shifting commuter travel to less congested hours of the day. While not a substitute for new highways, demand management has been increasingly embraced in densely settled suburbs where community opposition and environmental considerations have precluded or severely limited the opportunities for new road construction.

Participation of the business community in demand management is deemed essential to the success of traffic mitigation programs. Developers, property managers, and employers can offer tangible incentives to workers to modify their commuting habits. Thus, they can directly influence the volume of automobile traffic.

This article presents a critical evaluation of the state of the art of traffic mitigation, with special emphasis on its impact on the development community. The article is based on the author’s experience as a consultant to local governments and private developers, and does not purport to be an exhaustive research analysis.

## Voluntary Traffic Mitigation Programs

Traffic mitigation efforts fall into two categories. Some are undertaken voluntar-

ily; others are mandated by local government. Voluntary programs are most likely to occur where property owners and tenants are strongly motivated by economics to maintain a high degree of accessibility.

Voluntary traffic mitigation programs are carried out either by individual companies or through transportation management associations. Employer-sponsored ridesharing programs date back to the oil embargo of the 1970s. Although corporate support of ridesharing (and employee interest in ridesharing) has declined substantially since then, there are still pockets of significant employer-sponsored ridesharing activity, notably in Los Angeles, Houston, San Francisco, Connecticut, and northern New Jersey.

However, the most visible manifestation of a growing private sector involvement in traffic mitigation has been the expansion of transportation management associations (TMAs). In only a few years, these organizations have assumed a major role in local efforts to address mobility problems. Today, more than 30 TMAs are operating nationwide, and their number continues to grow. Interest in them is particularly prevalent in high-growth metropolitan areas where traffic conditions have reached alarming proportions—Chicago, Dallas, Los Angeles, northern New Jersey, Orange County, the San Francisco Bay Area, and Washington, D.C.

Each TMA is individually crafted to respond to the special needs and circumstances of the area it serves. Some TMAs are organized around a single activity center (for instance, a suburban office park), while others are regional in scope. Some TMAs are purely private (such as TMAs at Tysons Corner, Virginia, and Irvine, Cali-

fornia), while others are partnership ventures supported by a mix of private and public funds (such as the TMAs at the Dallas Parkway Center, Morris County, New Jersey, the Baltimore/Washington International Airport, and North Bethesda, Maryland).

TMAs also differ in the way they view their mission. Some TMAs focus on policy leadership and advocacy, and serve primarily as a voice of the business community in local transportation decision making. Others assume a more operational role and function as shadow transportation districts. They facilitate ridesharing, coordinate alternative work hours programs, administer parking management programs, and manage a variety of local transportation services such as internal circulators, park-and-shuttle systems, and subscription buses. Many TMAs also try to promote a positive image of mobility intended to reassure existing and prospective tenants. Most TMAs engage in all three types of activities, though they may do so with differing degrees of emphasis.

## Negotiated Traffic Mitigation Requirements

Where voluntary efforts have been found lacking, local governments have turned to mandating private sector involvement as a condition of individual project approval (negotiated requirements), or through ordinances enacted in the exercise of local police powers (regulatory requirements).

Negotiated traffic mitigation agreements have become a common practice in numerous jurisdictions, including Dallas, Fairfax County, Virginia, Los Angeles, Montgomery County, Maryland, Orlando, San Francisco, and Seattle. Most such agreements set a traffic reduction goal (often expressed in terms of a minimum level of ridesharing participation, or a stipulated reduction in the number of automobile trips), but differ in the degree of prescription concerning implementation methods. An example of a nonprescriptive approach is the trip reduction agreements negotiated by the Montgomery County Planning Board. The agreements specify the number of vehicle trips to be ultimately eliminated from a given development but leave wide latitude to the developers in deciding how those reductions are to be achieved. Other jurisdictions have adopted a more prescriptive approach. Thus, the “development disposition agreements” ne-

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