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Trends and Policy Considerations of VMT in mid-2020

Elliot W. Martin, PhD
Research and Development Engineer

June 12th, 2020
IEPR Workshop
US Trends in VMT

- Note that this is a 12-month moving sum, so each data point reflects the previous 12 months of driving.

- The drop you see is 4%, the largest on record since World War II.
US Trends in VMT per Capita

• April 2020 value is 6.5% off of the peak and is similarly the largest drop since World War II.
Measurement of VMT

- The TVT is the most dynamic and responsive dataset on national data on VMT.
- It is measured using a combination of HPMS data and sensor counts.
- While it is the longest running VMT time series, it is not a direct measurement of VMT, but an approximation that is subject to revision.
- There is no collective and regular measurement of vehicle odometer data, at least as rendered into national trends. Such data, if including passenger and freight vehicles, would constitute a more direct measurement of driving.
National Fuel Demand

• Drop in fuel demand largest and lowest consumption in the last 30 years.
• Partial recovery noted in gasoline
• Data through May 2020

Source: US Energy Information Administration

U.S. Weekly Product Supplied

Millions of Barrels per Day

U.S. Product Supplied of Finished Motor Gasoline Mbbl/d
U.S. Product Supplied of Kerosene-Type Jet Fuel Mbbl/d

Source: US Energy Information Administration
Safety and Public Health Impacts

US Motor Vehicle Fatalities
NHTSA FARS

Total Fatalities

- Fatalities
- Fatality Rate per 100 Million VMT

2019 is NHTSA’s preliminary estimate
Policy Responses - Telecommuting

• Telecommuting has expanded considerably as a result of the pandemic.

• Many companies have found that they can operate effectively with a much smaller footprint.
  • “We’ve proven we can operate with effectively no footprint,”
    – James Gorman, CEO Morgan Stanley

• Will this trend continue?
• Can policy encourage a continuation telecommuting?
  • What would be the equivalent social cost prevented?
Policy Response – Reduced Street Access for Vehicles

• The absence of vehicle traffic has allowed some cities to close streets to through traffic.

• Many cities are doing this, at least temporarily, how permanent will it be?

• Will this lead to long term changes in behavior?
Policy Response – Expanded Shared Mobility

• While the economic impacts have been severe, many have learned how to technically function and survive with far less personal vehicle driving.

• Can shared mobility, in the form or carsharing, micromobility, TNCs, and microtransit, step in to fill mobility needs as we re-learn how to be mobile in the post-Covid world?

• How will public transit evolve in the face greater health concern with physical proximity?

Sources: City of West Sacramento, Via, Elliot Martin
Summary

• VMT is likely to rebound as economies re-open.

• However, the forced reduction in VMT brought on by Covid-19 has taught us a lot about what is achievable in terms of function and survival.
  • Certain industries require a physical presence, but many companies (and governments) have learned that they can continue operations rather well in the absence of physical office presence.

• The pandemic has been awful by many measures.
  • Policy measures that build on lessons learned from this period could help mitigate the public health, national security, and environmental impacts that inevitably arise from excessive VMT.
THANK YOU, QUESTIONS?