



# AIR QUALITY CONFORMITY 101

When COMPASS develops or updates the regional long-range transportation plan (*Communities in Motion*) or the regional Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), it is required to demonstrate that the transportation projects funded via these plans will not degrade (hurt) air quality in the Treasure Valley. This is referred to as an “air quality conformity demonstration.”

The federal government sets health-based air quality standards for air pollutants. Areas that have violated these standards (an air pollutant is above the allowable level) are referred to as “nonattainment areas” (they have not “attained” the standard); areas that were nonattainment areas in the past, but have re-attained the standard, are called “maintenance areas,” because they must maintain compliance with the standard.

Because exhaust (emissions) from motor vehicles is a major source of air pollution, the federal government mandates that transportation projects, such as adding lanes to a highway, that use federal funds or are deemed to be “regionally significant” in nonattainment and maintenance areas cannot degrade air quality.

Northern Ada County is a maintenance area for two air pollutants – coarse particulate matter (airborne dust and other particles; referred to as “PM<sub>10</sub>”) and carbon monoxide. Northern Ada County violated the federal standard for these pollutants in the 1980s and early 1990s, and has been in compliance ever since.

States must have plans in place that show how nonattainment and maintenance areas will achieve or maintain compliance with the standard. Those plans set “budgets” for the amount of air pollution that can be emitted by motor vehicles. To demonstrate air quality conformity, an area must show that transportation projects would not cause motor vehicles to exceed the established budget, or in some cases, show that building a project would result in less pollution than not building it.

COMPASS uses computer modeling to determine if projects in a transportation plan would degrade air quality. If the projects will not degrade air quality, then the plan, and the projects in it, have met air quality conformity demonstration requirements and can move forward.

If air quality conformity cannot be demonstrated, new federally funded and/or regionally significant transportation projects cannot be constructed.

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