



September 23, 2011

Tahoe Metropolitan Planning Organization
P.O. Box 5310
Stateline, NV 89449

Dear Ms. Karen Fink,

The League to Save Lake Tahoe appreciates the opportunity to provide scoping comments on the Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) and the Sustainable Community Strategy (SCS).

We also incorporate comments from the North Tahoe Citizen Action Alliance and the Tahoe Area Sierra Club on the Tahoe RTP/SCS, as well as the Attorney General of California's September 16, 2011 comments on the San Diego Association of Governments RTP/SCS.

Impacts and Mitigation

The Notice of Preparation (NOP) states that the RTP/SCS provides "for mitigation of adverse transportation conditions in the Lake Tahoe Basin and help[s] achieve applicable carrying capacity thresholds..." Although the intent of these programs is to mitigate transportation, the programs and associated projects may in fact cause additional adverse impacts to the environmental thresholds. It is imperative that these programs and projects are closely analyzed for their impacts.

The Attorney General of California, in a September 16, 2011 letter addressed a similar concern with the DEIR for the San Diego Association of Governments' (SANDAG) RTP and SCS. The letter states that the DEIR must analyze "specific mitigation measures for the GHG emissions impacts from land use....the legal requirements of CEQA, including the requirement to mitigate significant impacts to the extent feasible, are not satisfied simply because the RTP/SCS meets the targets contained in SB 375 for 2020 and 2035. CEQA demands a full analysis and all feasible mitigation of every significant impact resulting from the implementation of the RTP/SCS, throughout the full life of the Plan."

Land use assumptions

The Regional Plan update has not been adopted. Therefore using land use assumptions from staff's RPU preferred alternative for the transportation is putting the cart before the horse. It is unclear which land use patterns will be adopted in the RPU and this could impact the Regional Transportation Plan.

So much is unclear and unknown regarding the land use patterns proposed in the RPU and the impacts on transportation and the environment. The theory being relied upon in the RPU is that bringing in more people to the Tahoe Basin will reduce GHG if these people reside in compact developments. The problem is that bringing in more people will increase overall GHG emissions. Even if there is a small decrease in GHGs on a per capita basis, an increase in per capita will cause an overall increase in GHGs.

The RPU is not presenting a scenario in which development will be deconstructed in sprawled areas and moved and reconstructed on a one to one basis in a compact "urban" setting. Instead the sprawl will continue to exist and "urban" areas will increase their capacity to host additional residents and visitors.

It is possible that the RPU and Transportation Plan as proposed may meet requirements of SB 375 by reducing GHG on a per capita basis, but impact threshold standards by increasing overall CO, O₃, VMT, and atmospheric nutrient loading. It is imperative that threshold standards and GHG reductions are both attained. Sacrificing thresholds for a per capita GHG decrease must not occur.

The Attorney General of California has expressed a similar concern with San Diego Association of Governments RTP and SCS. The AG's September 16, 2011 letter states, "although SANDAG will meet the SB 375 goals for per capita GHG targets for cars and trucks set for it by ARB in 2020 and 2035, the DEIR shows that total GHG emissions from cars and light-duty trucks in 2050 will increase over the 2010 emissions level.....SANDAG must, however, make a determination whether the project as a whole has significant climate change impacts."

Ozone non-attainment

The California side of the Tahoe Basin has been designated as non-attainment transitional for ozone by the California Air Resources Board. How will the RTP and SCS reduce ozone precursors from transportation in order to bring the region back into attainment status?

Localized Impacts

By creating compact town centers, impacts become localized. In a compact area there are more cars traveling and therefore more emissions being produced in smaller area instead of being spread out. The impacts of concentrating pollution must be examined.

EIR/EIS for specific projects

It is unclear if the six projects listed in Table 1 will undergo a separate EIR/EIS. The impacts from these projects will be significant and it has been implied that since these projects are part of the RTP that they may be exempt from a full EIR/EIS and instead may be able to utilize a less significant form of environmental review. It is imperative that these projects are studied in a full environmental review.

Water Borne Transit

A passenger water ferry is one of the proposed projects for the RTP. Unfortunately at this time, water borne transit is extremely polluting and will not decrease GHG and air quality indicators. Water borne transit must not be part of the RTP unless it can be shown to decrease these emissions. A family of four traveling in a passenger sedan is very efficient compared to putting that same family on a polluting water ferry. SB 375 was set up to reduce passenger cars and light trucks. It does not take into account that getting people out of their cars and onto a boat will likely cause an increase in emissions. The RTP must find a way that gets people out of their cars and using a form of transportation that is less polluting than the cars that they are not driving. A family of four in a sedan is a relatively efficient form of

transportation. Getting the family to walk or bike would be less polluting. Putting that same family on water taxi may be more polluting.

In addition to examining passenger ferries, the DEIR must also analyze the impacts from all boats to GHG and other emissions.

Fanny Bridge

Although not detailed in the NOP, it has recently been proposed that the Fanny Bridge realignment will consider increasing the size of this bridge from a two to a four lane road. Although increasing road lanes decreases congestions, it eventually will allow an increased capacity for additional vehicles and for pollution.

Loop Road

This is a significant project and a full EIR/EIS will be needed.

Olympics

At a recent public hearing it was announced that the RTP will include transportation plans for a successful Olympic bid. Before creating a transportation plan, the impacts of the Olympics on environmental thresholds must be evaluated.

SCS Implementation Strategy in August APC packet

The NOP does not provide any specifics about the SCS strategies. However, in the August 2011 APC, a three page list of SCS strategies is included in Attachment B of the Regional Plan Update Re-scope. Why these specifics were not included in the NOP is unclear, but the list in Re-scope creates a lot of concerns and questions. Many of these strategies are unrelated to GHG or may actually cause an increased in GHG. Very few of these are real strategies to reduce GHG.

- 1) **Implement zoning that is tailored to desired community character.** It is unclear how tailoring zoning to community character will decrease GHGs.
- 2) **Promote pedestrian and transit-oriented (PTOD) and mixed use development patterns.** Creating compact centers while not deconstructing sprawl will not accomplish a decrease in GHGs. The RPU is only proposing deconstructing for sensitive environmental areas (i.e, SEZ). However, in order to create a reduction in GHG and other air pollutants, the land use patterns must deconstruct sprawl, not merely created more development that is of a compact form.
- 3) **Revise land coverage rules to incentivize environmental redevelopment in Town, Tourist, and Neighborhood Centers.** This strategy is trying to make up for an inconsistency in coverage, but the strategy is backward. Today 70% coverage can occur in Community Plans on undeveloped land, but if the land is already developed it has a 50% limitation instead. The strategy is to raise the developed land to 70% instead of considering lowering the undeveloped land to 50%. Allowing 50% coverage on vacant or not vacant parcels would incentivize development, but not increase coverage. The DEIR must look at the alternative of reducing coverage in on undeveloped parcels to 50% and not raising the amount that can be built that can be built on developed parcels. Allowing 50% coverage on vacant or not vacant parcels would incentivize development, but not increase coverage. This way the land use pattern can be met with less impacts to other thresholds.
- 4) **Prioritize transfer of coverage from sensitive lands to Town, Tourist, and Neighborhood Centers.** Transferring the largest incentives for coverage transfer from sensitive lands to Town,

Tourist, and Neighborhood centers assists in moving development off of sensitive land rather than out of sprawled development. An example is the Boulder Bay development that took units from a sensitive land in the highly urbanized south shore and moved then to non-urbanized Crystal Bay. Furthermore this development was morphed so it accommodates more people with more cars. Transferring development off of sensitive land is a high priority for reasons other than the reduction of GHG. In order to create a land use pattern to reduce GHG a strategy needs to focus on deconstructing development in sprawled areas and relocated at the same size and scale to a less sprawled and more developed area.

- 5) **Require minimum densities in Town and Tourist Centers.** The document states that SCS legislation calls for minimum density standards to be instituted if Housing Need Assessments show lack of housing near transit. Creating minimum densities 1) will have environmental impacts 2) will, without a simultaneously deconstruction of sprawled areas, increase GHG and 3) will have no benefit without a good transit system.
- 6) **Update land coverage standards to incentives the removal of soft coverage from SEZs.** Incentivizing the removal of soft coverage in SEZs is not a land coverage strategy that will reduce GHG. Soft coverage is an area of land that does not have hard coverage on it. In other words soft coverage are areas where the soil has been compacted but the land has no buildings, no homes, no offices, no stores, no hotels, etc. Soft coverage has no development on it by definition and so there is no development that can be moved from this area into a compact “urban area.” Creating coverage that can now have buildings out will create development that brings more people and more cars and therefore more GHG and other air pollutants. This is not a strategy to reduce GHG.
- 7) **Create incentives for mixed-income housing.** How does incentivizing mixed-income housing reduce GHG?
- 8) **Exempt moderate income housing allocation requirements.** Much care needs to be taken in studying how exempting moderate income housing from locations will decrease GHG. This strategy may actually increase GHG by creating additional capacity and increasing the number of cars in the Basin.
- 9) **Express desired community character in new design standards.** It is completely unclear how expressing desired community character in new design standards will reduce GHG.
- 10) **Emphasize complete streets to support PTOD.** This is a good strategy that may assist in reducing GHG.
- 11) **Require projects to incorporate non-automobile transportation modes.** This could potentially reduce GHG.
- 12) **Create a Sustainable Communities Strategy (SCS) in compliance with California law.** This is not an implementation strategy. It is statement that says the plan will comply with the law.
- 13) **Update the allocation pool for Residential, CFA, and TAU for the next planning horizon.** The link between providing allocations and reducing GHG is unclear. Providing additional allocations will instead increase GHG emissions and other emissions rather than decreases GHG and other emissions.
- 14) **Use CFA to incentivize environmental redevelopment.** It is unclear how giving CFA incentives to projects that transfer development from sensitive areas will reduce GHG. As mentioned above in order to reduce GHG, development should be transferred (without morphing) from sprawled areas to less sprawled areas. The sensitivity of the land is unrelated to GHG. Many areas of sensitive land already occur in the so called town/tourist centers, etc.

Ideas to include in the RTP

- 1) Transit should use the best available technology, including hybrid vehicles rather than alternative fuel vehicles
- 2) Policy needs to be implemented to ensure that ridership is high enough to justify the emissions from transit.
- 3) The RTP should consider road/land reductions rather than expansions.
- 4) The impacts of the aviation and the City of South Lake Tahoe airport must be re-evaluated. This type of transportation is very impactful on the environment (including huge GHG emissions) and the gain to the transportation system is negligible.
- 5) The RTP must look at overall emissions for the Basin, not simply look at emissions per capita.

It is imperative that the Regional Transportation Plan and Sustainable Communities Strategy not only reduce GHG and mitigate transportation issues. These plans must also assist in achieving and maintaining the Bi-State Compact mandated environmental thresholds.

If you have any questions, please contact the League to Save Lake Tahoe at 530-541-5388.

Sincerely,

Nicole Gergans
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League to Save Lake Tahoe