

December 12, 2023

Tahoe Regional Planning Agency
Regional Plan Committee and staff
128 Market St., Stateline, NV, 89410
Submitted via email

RE: Transportation and Sustainable Communities Threshold Standard 1

Regional Plan Committee Chair, Members and TRPA Staff:

The League to Save Lake Tahoe (League) appreciates the opportunity to provide comments on implementation of the Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT) Threshold standard (Transportation and Sustainable Communities Threshold Standard 1). The League is dedicated to protecting and restoring the environmental health, sustainability, and scenic beauty of the Lake Tahoe Basin. In connection with our mission, we support transportation solutions for Tahoe and advocate for the implementation of projects and policies contained within regional land use and planning documents that reduce dependence on the private automobile, including the Bi-State Compact (Compact), the 2012 Regional Plan Update (Regional Plan) and the Regional Transportation Plan/Sustainable Communities Strategy (RTP/SCS).

The League requests that the TRPA RPC recommend that the Governing Board take action to recognize that Goal DP-5.4.B has NOT been met, and therefore, as stipulated in the TRPA's code of ordinances, there shall be no-net unmitigated VMT for all projects, except for deed restricted affordable and/or workforce housing and single family residential until an ongoing source of funding in excess of \$20million/year is secured. The TRPA Governing Board must choose option 1: Implement the goals and policies in DP-5.4.B as adopted to remain in accordance with their code. Any other option would be in direct conflict with TRPA's own code and against good faith negotiations made between the League, the Attorney General's Office, and TRPA staff. We hope that TRPA sees this trigger not as a setback, but as a demonstration of our shared commitment to achieve and maintain our thresholds, achieve sustainable transportation funding, and to protect Lake Tahoe's environment against unmitigated impacts.

This trigger was diligently thought out and created through numerous iterations. It is a safeguard with a direct connection to the goal of reducing VMT per capita in the Basin while ensuring that additional development and associated VMT does not continue to outpace efforts to mitigate those impacts (to be realized by implementation of the Regional Transportation Plan) The intent was to sustainably fund implementation of the RTP. Full implementation of the RTP is required to have any chance of achieving the 6.8% VMT per capita reduction articulated in the TSC-1 threshold. We agreed to give ourselves two years to identify sustainable funding sources (ones that are ongoing and can be reasonably expected to continue for the duration of the RTP. We are excited to celebrate the success of one year of increased funding for transportation projects in Tahoe in 2023, but it is not sustainable and thus we need to implement the safeguard - not putting more pressure on our transportation system with additional VMT until we find sustainable funding for RTP implementation.

Delaying and/or reinterpreting triggers and language around the negotiated VMT Threshold at the 11th hour of the agreed upon deadline demonstrates a lack of confidence in the approach and success shown in this last year of securing funding, contradicts TRPA's mission and what Tahoe needs desperately- sustainable funding for transportation that protects water quality and Lake Tahoe's renowned clarity. The League strongly believes that TRPA needs to adhere to its commitment and code (pulling the trigger on December 31, 2023) which would inspire progress towards achieving sustainable funding with our local, state and federal partners as it demonstrates the collective urgency in needing to find this funding and the willingness to hold all of us accountable to our agreements and common goals.

The TRPA must adhere to their own code of ordinances and their mission to protect Lake Tahoe by following their own codified measures—anything else would be an example of environmental backsliding. The history, intent, and substance of these triggers is clear and not ambiguous: a detailed account of the conversations and intent of these triggers and assumptions can be provided to RPC members if desired.

Overview and Background

For the purpose of the League's comments, we are not going to review the minute details or interpretation of single words and phrases and their original intent - years of documentation supports the specific language and intent in Goal DP-5.4.B. For context, please review our last two official comment letters regarding the vehicle miles traveled (VMT) threshold update, attached. The purpose of those comments was twofold: 1) to thank TRPA staff and board members for working with us in good faith for two years to settle on these triggers— over two years if you include the related transportation model and Regional Transportation Plan (2020 RTP) updates; and 2) memorialize the agreement that we, TRPA, and the California Attorney General's office (AG) came to.

Here are the highlights of what was agreed upon between the League, TRPA, the Attorney General, and what we publicly supported in 2021:

- New and updated goals and policies for VMT which were agreed upon and codified which support the objective of the update.
- The VMT per capita metric for Tahoe based on dynamics of traveler types and patterns.
- The ability to revisit the target on a regular basis and make the VMT reduction target more ambitious ,especially as we begin to implement RTP and RPU in concert.
- Automatic triggers and responses: The proposal includes two sets of automatic triggers and responses. The League consistently advocated for these automatic triggers and responses because they reduce uncertainty and create policies and plans that are more resilient to external factors like changes in leadership, politics, and the economy.
 - The proposed automatic trigger which will require all projects to be VMT neutral if as a region we are not collecting revenue to implement the RTP by 2024.
 - Specificity is provided on the regional revenue source. For the 2024 revenue target and automatic response, the revenue source must raise at least the amount of money identified in the RTP which ensures that enough money is raised to implement projects and programs that will meet the VMT per capita reduction target.
 - The planned progress checks and resulting mitigation fee increases if we are not on track to meet the VMT reduction target.
- The advisory body to guide adaptive management. This, along with monitoring, is the cornerstone of the long-term, ongoing adaptive approach.
- Project-level screening criteria that incentivizes development in Town and Regional Centers and provides allowances for affordable housing.
- The mitigation fee update to incentivize development in Town and Regional Centers, prioritize VMT reduction project design and mitigation, and directly support projects included in the RTP.

History of League Involvement

Below, we provide a brief history of the purposefully linked transportation model update, 2020 RTP update, and VMT threshold update. We recognize that most of the current board, and TRPA's current executive director, were not deeply involved in the multi-year effort. Most of the TRPA staff that did the majority of the work, along with all of the current League and AG staff, were there through it all. The final decisions in April of 2021 are the current conditions. Detailed are some of the concessions given along the way. These concessions help explain why the League is unwilling to back down from the codified, negotiated, and clearly required implementation measures designed to achieve and maintain the VMT threshold.

Transportation Model

The League sat on the Model Update Working Group which convened in October 2018 and worked with TRPA through 2020 with a transparent stakeholder process to understand what the model does, what it doesn't do, and how it works; provide input on model assumptions and inputs; and endorse the model assumptions and inputs. After a year and a half of detailed work with TRPA and other stakeholders, the League endorsed the model inputs and outputs which provided the underlying data for the RTP and VMT threshold updates.

Through the VMT model update, run, and related activities, it was confirmed that the region had exceeded the pre-2021 VMT Threshold, which was an absolute cap on annual VMT in the Basin. Under the old threshold, TRPA was not allowed to approve development projects until we were back under the cap. Since at least 2016, the League had requested a “no net VMT” policy until the existing and projected traffic conditions were understood. Instead of pursuing legal action, the League worked with TRPA in good faith negotiations to work collaboratively.

Despite our frustrations at the time with “moving the goalposts” after not maintaining the threshold, we decided to work with TRPA to update the VMT threshold.

Regional Transportation Plan

The RTP fundamentally offsets the transportation impacts from the Regional Plan. However, the RTP has never (in 30 years) been fully implemented, while development projects under the Regional Plan continue to progress. The RTP and the VMT threshold updates proceeded on parallel tracks, largely in 2020. The League provided input throughout 2020 and 2021 to TRPA staff and through public comments to the TRPA Governing Board and Committees. The Plan was officially adopted by the TRPA Governing Board in April 2021 after being delayed four months while the VMT threshold update was completed. The League supported the RTP largely because it was a realistic plan for achieving the new VMT threshold's per capita VMT reduction target. It became clear that there was not enough money projected to come to the Tahoe Region to fully implement the RTP. Due to this funding gap of \$40 million annually, and the need for the RTP to be fully implemented in order to achieve and maintain the new VMT threshold, a funding aspect was added to the implementation plan for the new VMT threshold.

VMT Threshold

In March 2020, TRPA created a VMT Threshold Update work plan. Because the threshold update was so complicated and nuanced, stakeholders - with the League as one of the two most engaged - took until April 2021 to agree on a threshold update package. The League publicly supported this plan due to the commitments listed above, see attached comment letter from April 28, 2021.

The League conceded on several points as follows in the spirit of collaboration, including:

- A per capita VMT reduction goal instead of an absolute VMT cap which was the strength of the old threshold.
- VMT neutrality – The League wanted to start the threshold process as if TRPA had acknowledged surpassing the old VMT threshold by requiring VMT neutral development until a regional revenue source is being collected.
- The League conceded on the timing for the second trigger – we wanted to measure VMT after 4 years instead of the 8 years that was adopted.

Bi-State Consultation meetings

The Bi-State consultation group focused on funding the RTP in 2021 after the RTP and VMT threshold updates were completed, and the funding targets and repercussions for not reaching them were finalized. A consulting company, RGS, was hired by TRPA and TTD to identify potential funding sources to achieve the \$40 million annual funding gap in the RTP. They created a “Briefing Binder” in November

2021 that was very similar to TTD's past One Tahoe effort. A Basin Entry fee or "zonal fee" was considered, but the Governors in both states, as well as both states' constitutions put serious limitations on this and there was not enough support outside of Tahoe.

In 2022, the Bi-State Consultation devised a target for a three-way split to bring in \$20 million needed annually over 10 years to implement priority transportation projects that would help achieve the most important goals of the RTP (e.g. high VMT-reducing projects). This is now being called the 7-7-7 plan, referring to \$7 million each from the federal government, the two states combined, and local sources in Tahoe. This proposal was submitted to the Nevada Legislative Oversight Committee, which was expecting a plan in 2022.

It is important to note that the 7-7-7 plan for funding high priority projects over 10 years is *part of, not instead of* the Regional Plan requirement to fill the full RTP funding gap at \$40 million over 20 years in order to achieve and maintain the VMT threshold.

Intent

Negotiating In good faith and in the spirit of collaboration, the League would like to reiterate the intent of triggering management responses. The purpose of the funding trigger is to take a pause and not add VMT to Tahoe, while providing additional motivation to fund the Regional Transportation Plan.

In addition to our referenced comment letters containing the items listed above that were agreed upon, it is worth the time to glance over the meeting minutes from April 28, 2021 when the VMT threshold was adopted.

Quoting TRPA staff lead Dan Segan from the April, 2021 approval of the new VMT threshold standard: *"The last part of this adaptive management framework is triggered management responses which is the backstop to the adaptive management process. These are things that they hope never go into effect because the collaborative process to implement the programs is working and they are hitting all the milestones that have been established. In the advent that it is not working, there are two triggers included in this proposal. The first is a funding trigger that goes into effect in 2024 and acknowledges that we know we need additional monies to implement the vision that's laid forth in the Regional Transportation Plan and drive progress towards standard attainment. They've established an aggressive goal for regional funding for the partnership to work towards. If that goal is not met then there's a trigger that states that the standard of significance for projects within the region will be no net unmitigated VMT."*

At that same meeting, past Governing Board member Bill Yeates who was one of the board members most involved in the updates closed his remarks by saying "He's proud of what staff has done and wholeheartedly supports the recommendation."

Cindy Gustaffson made her remarks after Mr. Yeates: "Ms. Gustafson dittoed the comments and accolades to staff for their hard work and bringing all the partners together to work on this."

The threshold update was unanimously approved.

The League could provide dozens of additional citations from public meetings and staff-level meetings between 2019 and 2021 that further demonstrate the shared intent and agreements.

Next steps and League Recommendation

Despite agreed-upon and codified automatic triggers and responses we find ourselves here two and half years later discussing what happens on December 31st.

The League does not want to take away from the success in achieving the 7-7-7 strategy for one year – the first year that it was truly a focus for Basin partners. This progress shows that the threat of this trigger has already begun working. More money came to Tahoe for transportation due to hard work from local agencies and organizations, and our state and federal partners. The League played a foundational role in bringing microtransit to Tahoe, and launched and funded Lake Link on the south shore. Our unilateral and coalition lobbying on the state and federal levels has begun to show progress, and the need for transportation funding in order to keep developing in Tahoe has been a strong, attention-getting strategy.


This is the success we want to build on to achieve Regional Plan policy DP-5.4.B. Though we are supportive of the region's transportation funding for 2023, these accomplishments do not pass the bar for sustainable transportation funding. The 7-7-7 appendix in your packet lists project level planning projects and earmarks for many projects, some 7-7-7 priority projects and some other important projects included in the 2020 RTP.

The League recommends that the TRPA Governing Board recognize that Goal DP-5.4.B has not been met, and therefore, as stipulated in the TRPA's code of ordinances, there shall be no-net unmitigated VMT, except for deed restricted affordable and/or workforce housing and single family residential. TRPA Governing Board must choose option 1: Implement the goals and policies in DP-5.4.B as adopted.

The League looks forward to continuing advocating with the Tahoe partnership for sustainable funding around transportation at the federal and state levels- our collaborative efforts will be vital to ensuring success. We hope that TRPA sees pulling this trigger as an opportunity to work together to ensure the health and sustainability of the Tahoe Basin, its residents, and Lake Tahoe's renowned clarity which we all enjoy.

Please do not hesitate to reach out to me directly with any questions.

Sincerely,



Gavin Feiger
Policy Director
on behalf of the League to Save Lake Tahoe

April 27, 2021

Tahoe Regional Planning Agency
Regional Plan Implementation Committee & Governing Board
128 Market St., Stateline, NV, 89410
Submitted via email

RE: Vehicle Miles Traveled Threshold Update and Project Level Analysis Assessment

Regional Plan Implementation Committee & Governing Board Chair, Members and TRPA Staff,

The League to Save Lake Tahoe (League) appreciates the opportunity to provide our support for the Vehicle Miles Traveled Threshold Update and Project Level Analysis Assessment (VMT Threshold Update).

The League is dedicated to protecting and restoring the environmental health, sustainability, and scenic beauty of the Lake Tahoe Basin. In connection with our mission, we support transportation solutions for Tahoe and advocate for the implementation of projects and policies contained within regional land use and planning documents that reduce dependence on the private automobile, including the Bi-State Compact (Compact), the 2012 Regional Plan Update (RPU) and the Regional Transportation Plan/Sustainable Communities Strategy (RTP). **The League supports the VMT package included in the RPIC and Governing Board agenda packets and encourages the Committee and Board to adopt the VMT Threshold Update Package.**

The League appreciates being part of the vehicle miles traveled (VMT) working and technical groups. This threshold update and associated tasks are a top priority for the League, and we are happy to see the same level of focus from TRPA. We continue to share the vision expressed at the March 25, 2020 RPIC meeting where staff received direction to “update the current VMT threshold to address greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, mobility, and other concerns related to vehicle travel (e.g., compact mixed-use development in town centers to reduce reliance on the automobile) so that the updated standard(s) can be applied at both the regional and project levels.” With that vision in mind, our goal for the VMT threshold update was **to make sure that the VMT threshold helps ensure Regional Plan and RTP/SCS implementation, and that any VMT increases resulting from these plans include sufficient mitigation.**

For over a year, the League’s policy, advocacy, and transportation experts have been deeply involved in updating the VMT threshold. The proposed VMT Threshold Update strikes a good balance between adaptive and prescriptive approaches. The prescriptive approach makes the VMT target and the milestones (triggers) result in repercussions if milestones are not met (responses) clear to everyone involved. The complementary adaptive approach to the VMT Threshold Update (monitoring and advisory body recommendations) is needed in the future as new information becomes available. We would like to thank TRPA staff – especially Dan, Melanie, Michelle, and John Marshall – for spending so much time with us and other

stakeholders to collaboratively address the past deficiencies and current and future needs related to the VMT threshold. The proposed VMT Threshold Update in front of you today demonstrates the success of that collaborative effort. **Some specific aspects of the VMT Threshold Update that the League supports include:**

- New and updated goals and policies which support the objective of the update.
- The VMT per capita metric is appropriate for Tahoe based on dynamics of traveler types and patterns.
- The ability to revisit the target on a regular basis and make the VMT reduction target more ambitious, especially as we begin to implement RTP and RPU in concert.
- Automatic triggers and responses. The proposal includes two sets of automatic triggers and responses. The League consistently advocates for these automatic triggers and responses because they reduce uncertainty and create policies and plans that are more resilient to external factors like changes in leadership, politics, and the economy.
- The advisory body to guide adaptive management. This, along with monitoring, is the cornerstone of the long-term, ongoing adaptive approach.
- Project-level screening criteria that incentivizes development in Town and Regional Centers and provides allowances for affordable housing.
- The mitigation fee update to incentivize development in Town and Regional Centers, prioritize VMT reduction project design and mitigation, and directly support projects included in the RTP.

The redline versions of changes to the materials between meetings allow League staff and the public to evaluate how input and suggestions were addressed. **The League appreciates that our remaining concerns have been addressed, as can be seen in the redline versions since the March RPIC meeting:**

- More details are provided describing the advisory body's composition, role, and types of recommendations. The advisory body will provide accountability and more effectively guide implementation of projects and programs to achieve and maintain the VMT threshold with the requirement for the Governing Board to act on or provide written justification for not acting on advisory body recommendations. The timing of reports are better aligned with RTP updates and VMT reduction target years.
- Specificity is provided on the regional revenue source. For the 2024 revenue target and automatic response, the revenue source must raise at least the amount of money identified in the RTP which ensures that enough money is raised to implement projects and programs that will meet the VMT per capita reduction target.
- The small project screen is reduced from 1,300 VMT to 715 VMT outside of Town Centers.
- The mitigation fee is tied to the RTP constrained project list, and includes annual inflation.
- The additional automatic response to not meeting VMT reduction targets at the 8-year intervals.
- The milestones have been moved up one year to better align with RTP and advisory body and data availability.

We believe the final VMT Package as proposed today meets our goals, and includes most of our general and specific input and suggestions. For these reasons, **we support the VMT package included in the RPIC and Governing Board agenda packets and encourage the Committee and Board to adopt the VMT Threshold Update Package.**

The long process undertaken to update the VMT threshold has proven that we all share the same goals. As the RPIC discussed in March, implementing the RTP, in concert with the RPU, is how we will achieve and maintain the new threshold. Adopting the VMT Threshold Update today is a big step and worthy of celebration. It is one of the early steps towards achieving our shared vision. Going forward, we need to always keep in mind how to achieve the vision most effectively and efficiently. **We ask that the RPIC and Governing Board continuously look for ways to ensure implementation of our regional plans.**

On our end, **the League is committed and looking forward to continuing our work with TRPA staff and other partners to use our new threshold and tools to:**

- Determine the Mobility Mitigation Fee schedule. This fee needs to be high enough for projects in high-VMT areas to incentivize developing in low-VMT areas and include effective mitigation measures. Paying the fee needs to be more expensive than the mitigation to be effective.
- Finalize the project assessment tool. The League has had valid concerns with the previously used tool – TRIA. The tool's structure and the underlying data and assumptions have resulted in questionable outputs. We are encouraged by the ideas we have heard for the new tool that TRPA staff is currently developing, and we look forward to providing input before it is finalized.
- Assist in developing the project impact assessment VMT mitigation monitoring continuously over time. Moving to a per capita VMT efficiency standard is a big change from the absolute VMT standard that the Basin has been operating under since the 1982 adoption of threshold standards. Therefore, it is vital that a monitoring system is created to measure progress toward threshold attainment on the regional and project levels.
- Help ensure effective adaptive management through the new advisory body. This adaptive approach will only be successful if it is guided by robust monitoring data, not only measuring progress toward the VMT reduction target, but also monitoring the effectiveness of implementation actions and ground truthing of project-level assumptions.

Thank you again for your work tackling one of Tahoe's most impactful and persistent environmental problems. We look forward to working with TRPA and stakeholders to achieve what we believe are our common goals.

Sincerely,



Gavin Feiger
Senior Land Use Policy Analyst