

TRPA leaders worried about transportation

By Kathryn Reed

STATELINE – While there are 178 thresholds the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency is trying to achieve, it was traffic-transportation that garnered the most discussion this month.

The Governing Board adopted the 2015 Threshold Evaluation Report at its meeting last week. Within all of those standards are nine categories: air quality, water quality, soil conservation, vegetation, fisheries, wildlife, scenic resources, noise, and recreation.

“We need to start formulating a traffic management standard to get a handle on this. We need to understand how traffic works,” board member Clem Shute said.

Vehicle miles traveled – or VMT for short – is what TRPA and many other entities use when it comes to traffic. This was originally devised as an air quality tool. It’s a traffic count method.



Traffic at Camp Richardson on July 3, 2016. Photo/Bill Kingman

Board member Jim Lawrence is not convinced VMT should be used for all things the agency uses it for. He said transportation is too important to rely on one metric that might not be doing the job everyone says it does.

Executive Director Joanne Marchetta agreed that a better understanding of VMT is needed.

Anyone who drives in the basin knows traffic can be an issue. During peak periods with tourists it becomes a problem.

And anyone who tries to ride the bus, especially on the South Shore, knows it's not reliable and certainly doesn't come at frequent intervals. For those don't know what a BlueGo is, they wouldn't even know where the bus stop is because all it says is BlueGo – no bus symbol, not even the words "bus stop".

Austin Sass, who is South Lake Tahoe's rep on the TRPA board and the Tahoe Transportation District, believes the Governing Board should have better communication with the TTD board and staff.

"We need funding for free transportation," Sass said.

TTD's proposal to achieve that goal is a regionwide sales tax increase dedicated to transit. Before voters could weigh in on this it will take both state legislatures to agree to it.

These threshold reports are compiled every four years by TRPA. Just like in 2011, this report was peer reviewed by 15 independent scientists. They found 77 of the standards to be in attainment, either at or better than target or considerably better than target. That's up from 58 that were in attainment in 2011.

The report states, "Status continued to improve for water clarity, air quality, scenic and soil conservation. Areas needing continued focus include removal of land coverage on sensitive lands, new threats to forest vegetation, deep water plant communities, and the need for continued emphasis on water quality conditions (for) macroinvertebrates, periphyton (algae) and AIS control."

Board members voiced concern that there are too many thresholds and wonder if looking at what is being evaluated should be a priority. This way staff time could be better concentrated on issues that are relevant and not just doing something because the Compact says to.

Updating the threshold standards is a priority of staff. It's something that has not been done since they were adopted in the 1980s.