

## **Appendix L. Neighborhood Compatibility Review**

## **SOUTH TAHOE GREENWAY SHARED-USE TRAIL**

### **NEIGHBORHOOD COMPATIBILITY REVIEW**

In 2009, the Conservancy requested Alta Planning + Design (a bicycle facility planning, design, and research firm) to review a proposed 9.6 mile shared use trail link between the California/Nevada state line and Meyers, California. The purpose of this review was to present information related to both: 1) general compatibility between shared use trails and developed residential uses; and 2) to evaluate the specific trail details presented at that time. Since 2005, the Conservancy focused the project on the 3.5 mile connection in the core of South Lake Tahoe. The review presented here, therefore, includes information relevant to the revised South Tahoe Greenway Shared-Use Trail (Greenway), updated and augmented where necessary with published reports, plans, and research.

#### **Context**

The Greenway will be a new shared-use paved trail in South Lake Tahoe generally following the former Highway 50 Bypass corridor. Community trails such as proposed in South Lake Tahoe can be found in almost every city, town, and county in the United States. When properly designed and managed, they are typically considered one of the most important amenities and assets in the community, along with schools and parks.

Bike paths are a valuable addition to the transportation system and, at Lake Tahoe, new projects are reviewed during the TRPA permitting process as transportation facilities. Construction of bicycle and pedestrian improvements form important milestones in the Environmental Improvement Plan (EIP) and are needed to meet threshold standards or Regional goals for air quality, water quality, transportation systems, community design, and recreation. This Regional effort mimics initiatives at the state and federal levels as well. For example, the 1991 Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) legislation required that bicycle and pedestrian needs be considered along with other forms of private and public transportation and address the interconnectivity of various transportation modes and facilities.

In some locations, the Greenway will introduce a new facility type and level of use into primarily residential areas. New trails often raise questions about privacy, noise, property values, allowed uses, pet waste, neighborhood parking and traffic, and other issues. This review examines each of these issues related to the proposed Greenway.

## **Benefits of a Shared Use Trail**

While issues and potential problems are the focus of most trail planning and review, the benefits of a trail can be easily forgotten. Trails are some of the most popular features in American towns for good reason. First of all, linear activities like walking and bicycling are by far the most popular forms of recreation and exercise. California State Parks tracks resident's preferences for outdoor recreation activities. Shared-use trails like the Greenway provide opportunity for four of the top eight choices including: 1) walking for fitness or pleasure, 74%; 5) day hiking on trails, 47%; 7) jogging and running for exercise, 40%, and 8) bicycling on paved surfaces, 36%. (California State Parks, 2008)

Secondly, health benefits for trail users and the general population are undeniable. Americans are constantly being told to exercise more often, and having a safe place to walk, run, or bicycle in a neighborhood produces a tremendous health benefit. Access to shared use trails increases the attractiveness for people of all ages and abilities to make this important fitness choice and to integrate exercise into their daily activity. The Greenway proposal offers safer access for children to playfields and play grounds and for residents and visitors to diverse destinations while providing exercise and outdoor enjoyment.

Aside from individual health, shared use trails offer alternatives to driving for all sorts of short trips, reducing air and other emissions from automobiles and improving the overall general health of the community. For a user starting along Glenwood Ave., travel to Bijou Park along the Greenway will reduce the total trip length by 1.3 miles. For a user starting in the Sierra Tract, travel along the Greenway to Lake Tahoe Community College will reduce the total trip length by 2.1 miles. These distance savings greatly increase the attractiveness of walking or using a bicycle instead of an auto to access these desirable destinations. For a visitor destination such as South Lake Tahoe, offering visitors an alternative to driving up and down US Highway 50 and Pioneer Trail not only helps reduce traffic, but helps reduce air and noise pollution.

Shared use trails also support economic health in the communities they serve. Many studies conducted in the last 20 years confirm economic benefit from trail users, particularly in visitor dominated economies such as South Lake Tahoe. Visitors seek active outdoor recreation and spend money in the community on lodging, food, entertainment and shopping when they find destinations that provide it. Various studies in the Lake Tahoe Region estimate economic value of bike trails between \$6m and \$23m annually. (TRPA/TMPO, 2010) Trails also contribute to the local tax base by supporting property values along trail corridors. This is discussed further, below.

Finally, trails offer an intangible benefit of providing places where neighbors can meet and talk. While this activity occurs now along informal trails in the project corridor, the reality is that younger people, the disabled, and older citizens simply do not have as many options unless they are readily accessible to their homes. Trails bring people and communities together.

## Trail Use and Bicycle Networks

The purpose of a bicycle network in the Lake Tahoe Region is to serve as an alternative transportation system and provide high quality recreation opportunities. Community users and bike trail planners understand the increased benefits of a functional bicycle network over the current system of disconnected bike facility fragments. Indeed, trail managers find completing sections of the network increases use on the entire system beyond the use on the new segment alone. (personal communication, Cindy Gustafson, TCPUD, 2008) To be successful, a network must serve existing users, yet also must attract less frequent or more casual users. Bicycle users on shared use trails fall into three categories:

- *Experienced Riders.* The TRPA Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan identifies these riders as “Community and Utilitarian Cyclists” and “Road Cyclists”. (TRPA/TMPO, 2010) These riders have few safety concerns in sharing streets with motor vehicles. These users often travel faster than other bicyclists and are not hesitant to find the shortest distance between desired points, whether they follow a designated bike facility or not. They follow Class II and Class III routes easily, and will use Class I or separated bike paths if they offer direct access to desirable locations, particularly at off-peak times when higher speeds are more appropriate. (Road Cyclists, by their nature, eschew separated trails and prefer to follow vehicle routes rather than share pathways with recreational riders or pedestrians.) These users are much more likely to choose to ride a bicycle, even when the developed bicycle network is un-or under- developed.
- *Casual Riders.* Nearly 100 million people in the United States own bicycles; however, the Bicycle Federation of America estimates that fewer than five percent of these bike owners would qualify as experienced or highly skilled bicyclists. (BFA, bikewalk.org, 2010) In accommodating existing bicyclists and encouraging increased bicycle use, these numbers indicate that there will be more novice riders than advanced bicyclists using the non-motorized transportation system. This use group contains a mix of ages and abilities. These users are more concerned about safety and less able to negotiate steeper grades or changes in facilities (e.g. moving from Class I to Class II). They seek out separated pathways, although they will also use neighborhood streets (Class III) if the route is clearly signed. In the Tahoe Region, this category includes family groups and some tourists. Often these users are receptive to the idea of riding a bicycle instead of driving a car, yet they require a well-identified network built to good trail design standards to increase their bike use.
- *Occasional Riders.* Occasional riders encompass the users with the highest safety and connectivity concerns. They are more likely to be visitors not familiar with the area and/or those not used to bike riding. For example, one bike rental operator reports between 25-30% of his rental customers are people on vacation who never or rarely ride a bike at home. (personal communication, Peter Underwood, Olympic Bike Shop, 2011)

Beginner bicyclists, usually children, fall into this category as well. These users are very sensitive to distance, ease of using the system, and desirability of destination points. They seek a separated Class I system almost exclusively and will often drive to find it. (The exception is children in low-traffic neighborhoods who frequently learn and practice their skills on neighborhood streets. Children often reach Class I facilities through their neighborhood without driving to a trail access point.) TRPA identifies, “Tourists, often on rental bicycles, may ride more slowly than others due to their interest in the scenery and lack of familiarity with local routes.” (TRPA/TMPO, 2010) Trail design features can easily discourage these users including: trails that are too steep, cross too many side streets or driveways, are too closely situated to roadways, or that are discontinuous.

Based on these considerations, a trail network that addresses the needs of both experienced and less experienced riders should include safe separated paths, as well as a bike-friendly street system for those comfortable with moving with vehicular traffic.

The Greenway will help build the bicycle network in South Lake Tahoe by providing a continuous, separated trail following the north-south axis of the City development pattern. Branching from it to the east and west are separated trails along Ski Run Blvd. and Al Tahoe Blvd. Class II lanes along Pioneer Trail (existing) and US 50 (envisioned), as well as Class III neighborhood links, will further enhance the connectivity of the entire system.

It is useful to note that there has been a noticeable increase in bicycling in the Tahoe Region in the last several years. Bicycle advocates credit several trends for this increase: improving bike facilities including new connections in the network and much-needed maintenance on older trails, successful outreach efforts such as the Bike to Ride/Work/Play event during the month of May, sharply increased gas prices, increased focus on health and weight control, and the expanding concern for environmental impacts of private automobile use.

### **Specific Issues**

Problems with trails are usually associated with poor design and/or management. In general, bike trail projects are more frequently seen as top community priorities, and local agencies make them a priority to be designed and managed just as they would a city park or school. The author of one study on the effects of trails on adjacent private property noted the importance of trail design and concludes, “A home with a trail running very close behind it with no fencing or screening could be affected adversely, while an identical home with private trail access across a well-screened yard might be much more desirable as a result.” (Moore, et. al., 1992) With thousands of trails and greenways constructed and in use nationally and internationally, there are a myriad of ways to reduce or eliminate negative impacts to neighborhoods. Some of the common issues and techniques and the specific Greenway proposals used to address them are discussed below.

## *Noise*

Typical noise encountered along non-motorized shared use trails include the sounds of peoples' voices in small groups, narrow tires and other wheels on trail surfaces, and occasional bike bells. These sounds are very typical of residential neighborhoods and produce noise in the range of 60-70 db for normal conversation to 80 db for bells such as bike bells (both measured at 5 feet distance). (Branch, 1970) Bike tires, narrow and made of soft rubber and traveling at speeds less than 20 mph, produce significantly less noise than the typical car tire at the same low speed. The bike tire noise level is low enough so that no noise studies found for this review even examine it. Additionally, even low noise attenuates with distance. The typical distance between the proposed Greenway and adjacent residences is more than 50', further reducing the noise levels from trail use.

Neighbor concerns related to trail noise often focus on potential sources of increased noise including platoons of bicyclists or congregating teenagers. The Greenway offers poor facilities for either group because: (a) club cyclists prefer to ride faster than is practicable on shared use paths that attract high numbers of pedestrians, particularly when the path is only 10' wide (the AASHTO minimum recommended width) - given the choice, these groups will ride on streets with bike lanes such as Pioneer Trail; and (b) a high use trail with good visibility from streets and nearby houses will not attract teenagers who typically seek areas away from the public eye.

Residents in their homes are more sensitive to even low noise levels during times when ambient neighborhood noise is very low such as early morning and nighttime. Trail use on existing Tahoe Regional trails during these times is much lower than peak use and is more likely to involve solitary users, either bike commuters or individuals out for exercise (personal communication, Bob Bolton, Parks and Recreation Director, TCPUD, 2011)

Therefore, noise is not expected to be a significant problem on the Greenway.

## *Parking and Traffic*

The Tahoe Regional bicycle network strives to provide unbroken connections between originations and destinations without generating the need to "drive to ride". While this is true, experience with existing bike paths demonstrates up to 28% of trail users drive to a trail access point, then ride or walk the trail. (TCORP, 2007) The trails that attract the highest number of motor vehicles share similar characteristics: they offer longer distances with few roadway or driveway crossings and access to desirable natural resource destinations. From a nuisance standpoint, the trail access locations associated with this trail type attract vehicle traffic and parking needs.

The 3.5 mile Greenway in the core of South Lake Tahoe presents a different type of trail and should attract far less "drive to ride" use. Along its length from Van Sickle Bi-state Park to Sierra Tract, it crosses 14 streets, including at one signalized intersection. Thus, the longest

stretch of uninterrupted trail is less than 4,000 feet and unlikely to attract users from beyond the neighborhood just to ride the trail. While this is true, it is possible that occasional “drive to ride” use may occur, generating additional traffic and parking in neighborhood areas. In most situations, this will occur legally; neighborhood streets provide legal access and parking is allowed during the non-winter months on City streets. As each street crossing represents an access point, the high number of potential access points reduces the potential for any one access to attract high volumes of use. If parking for trail access becomes frequent enough to create nuisance for nearby neighbors, however, the Operational, Maintenance, and Management Strategy prepared for the Greenway trail identifies a series of actions the Conservancy can take to reduce problems. These actions include (but may not be limited to): posting signs educating users concerning trail etiquette and trespass issues, increased monitoring to reduce litter, trespass, or other problems associated with trail access parking, and increased use of fencing to better direct users to access points.

The potential to extend the Greenway south to Meyers could increase the attractiveness of the entire route for “drive to ride” use. Planning work for different extension routes making this connection identifies potential for some routes with high value transportation and recreation opportunities. When project plans progress on a potential southern trail extension, additional review may be necessary.

### *Property Values*

Neighbors along proposed new trail routes often voice concern about loss of property value with trail development. A review of economic studies related to multi-use trails identifies the following primary points:

- *Neighbors of existing trails and real estate agents believe trails have a neutral or positive effect on property values.* Multiple studies of existing trails throughout the United States conclude that trail effects on property sales are either neutral, or include higher sale prices and faster sales (less time on the market). A comprehensive review of studies examining greenway trails and their influences on property values identifies, “Across the studies there was broad consensus that trails have no negative impact on either the saleability of property (easier or more difficult to sell) or its value. There was a belief among some, typically between 20% and 40% of a sample, that there was a positive impact on saleability and value. However, the dominant prevailing sentiment was that the presence of a trail had no impact on these issues. (Crompton, 2001)

A separate comprehensive survey of six shared-use trails in Indiana queried adjacent property owners concerning property values and other neighbor concerns. The trails represent a mix of urban/suburban/rural areas. Property owners adjacent or near trails reported the presence of the trail had a neutral or beneficial effect on property values (86-96%) and ease of sale (81-93%). (Woltner, et al, 2001)

- *Empirical studies indicate a more complex relationship.* Many fewer empirical studies on property values have been conducted and they examine fewer areas of the country. In 2006, the Transportation Research Board funded property sale analysis for separated multi-use trails near Minneapolis, Minnesota. They found evidence of increased property value in urban and suburban settings at a neighborhood analysis level (aggregating data within ¼ mile). Examining property values for close proximity to trails produced more complex results. In urban areas, proximity to a separated trail increased property values (by an average \$510). In suburban areas, close proximity had a neutral or slightly negative effect (depressing home value by an average \$240). Study authors attribute some of the effect to trail type; rail-trail conversions typically involve more industrial corridors which may exert influence on prices. This effect in suburban areas appears to decrease over time as property owners use of trail facilities increases and new property owners self-select for trail proximity. (Transportation Research Board, 2006)
- *Attitudes toward active recreation matter and change over time.* All trail studies conducted identify high value and interest in trails as active recreation facilities at a community level. Resistance to new trails can be high, however, from property owners near proposed routes. Some evidence exists that property values near trails are better supported in communities with a more active resident population, particularly one that values bicycling. (Compton, 2001) Evidence also exists that neighbors value multi-use trails and use them in greater numbers than they had predicted prior to trail construction. (Wolter, Lindsey, et al, 2006)

While no community is exactly like South Lake Tahoe, community trails in Mammoth Lake, Tahoe Donner, Tahoe City/North Shore, Truckee, Susanville, and other mountain communities prove to be prized amenities by residents. Evidence exists of the importance of bike trails in South Lake Tahoe as well. Multiple surveys conducted by the City and TRPA in the last ten years place bike trails among the most popular recreation facilities. As additional support of bike trails, the City of South Lake Tahoe has been recognized as a *Bike Friendly Community* by the League of American Bicyclists, a designation that recognizes the City “welcomes cyclists by providing safe accommodation for cycling and encouraging people to bike for transportation and recreation.” ([www.bikeleague.org](http://www.bikeleague.org)) In 2000, residents of the Community Facilities District Recreation Joint Powers Authority in the City and El Dorado County passed Measure S, a local tax measure raising revenue for recreation facilities, including maintenance for new bike trails.

### *Loss of Freedom*

Neighbors who currently use the former US Highway 50 Bypass corridor for informal dog walking and other activities express concern that Greenway trail development and associated management will reduce their freedom by imposing new restrictions. Within the City of South Lake Tahoe, City ordinances establish requirements for dog leashes and prevent snowmobile

operation; no change in these provisions will occur with shared use trail development. Trail uses existing in the corridor now (e.g. walking and biking) will continue; no additional regulatory restrictions are contemplated related to shared use trail development.

Changes in some use with implications for user choices will occur, however, with the introduction of a new recreational facility (i.e. a paved path). On one hand, the paved trail will be available for all types of use earlier in the season compared with dirt trails that are muddy in the early spring. On the other hand, overall compliance with existing leash laws will increase at peak use periods without regard to enforcement levels with greater use and diversity of user types.

### *Crime/Vandalism*

In 1998, the Rails-Trails Conservancy and the National Park Service produced the most comprehensive examination to date of the relationship between crime and trail use. (Rails-Trails Conservancy/National Park Service, January 1998) The study examined crime statistics on 372 trails in urban, suburban, and rural settings. On urban and suburban trails (characteristics that match the proposed Greenway), study findings conclude incidents of major crime (aggravated assault, mugging, rape, or murder) much lower on trails than the national average for these settings. The rates of minor crimes (burglary or trespass on adjacent private property), were also low; less than 1% for burglary and 3% for trespass. Littering, graffiti and motorized use were more frequent problems, yet also were reported at lower rates than other parts of the surrounding communities.

The study also collected input from trail managers and law enforcement officials in the 372 communities examined. This testimony concludes that crime on trails mirrors crime in the community; in other words, safe neighborhoods produce safe trails. One quote from a sheriff in Green County, Wisconsin is illustrative: “The trail does not encourage crime, and in fact, probably deters crime since there are many people, tourists and local citizens, using the trail for many activities at various hours of the day.” (Rails-Trails Conservancy/National Park Service, 1998. page 4)

The Greenway alignment in the core of South Lake Tahoe follows streets along much of its route. In these situations, criminal access is much more likely to occur from the road and in cars rather than while walking or bicycling using a trail. In the sections of the alignment that cross undeveloped land, existing foot trails already introduce criminal access potential. Increased trail use by law abiding members of the public will reduce the attractiveness of these areas for criminal behavior. A well-used and managed trail is not likely to be an area for vagrants or criminals to congregate, and generally less so than an existing open space corridor with little or no formal management or oversight.

### *Visibility/Privacy*

The most often cited neighbor concern related to development of new trails relates in various ways to loss of privacy or increased visibility for adjacent residents. The Greenway is no exception. Even though people currently walk or bicycle in the corridor, the Greenway will attract additional users from more distant areas. While the Greenway will be located more than 50 feet from the vast majority of homes, in a few locations it will travel closer to residential units where existing right-of-way does not allow greater buffers.

A review of other popular community trails in residential areas, such as the Iron Horse Trail in Contra Costa County and the Tiburon Linear Path in Marin County, shows that the trails are often located within 50 feet or less from homes and backyards. While fencing and other measures are sometimes installed, for the most part trail users can see directly into yards. Interviews with these property owners have shown that while they are aware of the trail, it really is no different than a home abutting a public street, a park, or school. For these residents, the loss of some privacy is off-set by the advantage of having a quality pathway to use that is more easily accessible from the adjacent homes. People can and do walk on the sidewalks in front of homes in neighborhoods. Typical measures to increase privacy include curtains, screens, and reflectorized glass when needed, but generally the public respects the privacy of people and their homes. (Michael Jones, Alta Planning + Design, 2009)

Many studies conducted over the years also offer insight into this very personal concern. These studies include extensive interviews with neighbors before trail construction and after trail operation a number of years. A summary of the findings include:

- *The degree of apprehension prior to trail construction is related to the density of existing development.* In more urban neighborhoods, residents are less likely to be concerned about loss of privacy than in suburban developments. This can relate to an increased expectation of using and benefitting from the shared use trail and also involves a different expectation of privacy. Suburban residents expect more protection from physical and visual intrusion than urban residents. (Moore, et al., 1992)
- *The perception of loss of privacy relates to the existing nature of the proposed trail corridor.* When the trail proposal involves restoration of an existing degraded condition, neighbors view the trail and the loss of privacy it brings much more favorably than when a new trail is proposed in a more intact landscape. This is true even when the actual use patterns on the constructed trail do not differ. The difference relates to the change from a previous condition. (Compton, 2001)
- *The actual experience of adjacent residents to new trails is better than the prediction.* All studies examined for this review identified a heightened level of neighbor concern prior to new trail construction. This concern was universal, from urban to rural areas, and for both directly adjacent and more distant neighbors. In each situation, however, the actual experience of these same neighbors after several years of living near the new trail

was better than they feared before trail construction. For example, a survey of property owners gauging attitudes pre-and post- trail construction in Indiana found 53-63% of respondents found the trail a better neighbor than expected, and 60-88% felt the trail contributed positively to neighborhood quality. In part, the survey found attitudes improved as neighbors came to value the trail for their own use. Within at least two years, 70-95% of the neighbors reported using the trail on average between 1.4 to 3.1 days/week. (Wolter, Lindsey, et al, 2001)

- *The concerns related to privacy can be reduced through design techniques that include route choice, user control, visual screening and adequate management.* Compton concludes, "...the challenge for managers is to design trails to alleviate concerns about loss of privacy." (Compton, 2001)

Along the Greenway corridor, route choices considered by project planners recognized existing use pathways, sensitive environmental areas, and proximity to adjacent residences. The proposed trail route encounters residences closer than 50 feet near Glenwood and along Pioneer Trail. Proximity to residents in other neighborhoods exceeds 100 feet in most cases. For residences in close proximity, many are separated from the corridor with privacy fences currently. The project description allows provision of additional fencing to address privacy issues on a case-by-case basis. Landscape screening could also be considered, although the proposal excludes development of irrigation systems within the right-of-way, limiting the species choices possible. The proposal addresses user control through educational signage (for etiquette including near private property), location of user management fences (at the entrances to SEZ areas to keep users on the trail), and access to public spaces at parks along the route (to decrease potential for congregation in neighborhood areas). Additionally, the Operations, Management and Maintenance Strategy identifies the increased management presence for various purposes along the corridor.

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- **User Surveys and Economic Impact Analyses:** These reports identify each trail's success for conservation, recreation and economic development..
  - [Pine Creek Rail Trail, 2006](#) (📄 1.36M)
  - [Perkiomen Trail, 2008](#) (📄 3.47M)
- [Rail-Trail Maintenance & Operation: Ensuring the Future of Your Trail - A Survey of 100 Rail-Trails](#) (📄 1.6M)
- [Creating Active Communities: Ten Case Studies of Programs and Partnerships](#) (📄 1.56M)
- [Rail-Trails and Community Sentiment](#) (📄 1.58M)
- [Rail-Trails and Safe Communities](#) (📄 778K)
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