

TAHOE AREA REGIONAL TRANSIT SYSTEMS PLAN STUDY

Executive Summary

Prepared for the
Tahoe Regional Planning Agency
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The Tahoe Regional Planning Agency (TRPA) retained LSC Transportation Consultants, Inc., to prepare a Systems Plan Study for the Tahoe Area Regional Transit (TART) program operated by Placer County in the North Tahoe area as well as the remaining portions of eastern Placer County, Truckee, and Incline Village.

This plan document first presents and reviews the characteristics of the study area, including demographic factors. A thorough review of existing land use and transportation plans is then presented. The operating history of the transit services provided in the study area is then reviewed, and demand for transit services in the study area evaluated. Finally, a detailed Short Range Transit Plan is presented for the future improvement in TART services, as well as a more generalized discussion of longer-range means of improving the intermodal public transportation network serving the North Tahoe / Truckee region.

STUDY AREA

This study considered the portion of Placer County to the east of the Sierra Crest (both within and outside of the Tahoe Basin), as well as the nearby areas also served by the TART system: the Tahoma area in El Dorado County, the Truckee area in Nevada County, and the Tahoe Basin portion of Washoe County, Nevada. Population of the area was identified by the 2000 U.S. Census as 40,085. Of this total, 7.6 percent were elderly (age 65 or above), 2.3 percent were mobility-limited, 7.4 percent were low-income, while 3.1 percent of households did not own a private vehicle. Over the 1990s, total study area population grew by 40 percent, while population in the Tahoe Basin grew by 30 percent in the Placer County portion, 33 percent in the Washoe County portion, and 28 percent in the El Dorado County portion. The study presents detailed information on travel and commute patterns.

EXISTING TRANSIT SERVICES

The TART program is operated as an element of the Placer County Department of Public Works. The Main Line route currently operates seven days a week year-round from roughly 6:00 A.M. to 6:45 P.M. along the shores of Lake Tahoe, providing hourly service between Tahoma and North Stateline and half-hourly service between North Stateline and Incline Village. In addition, one bus is operated over the same span of service year-round from Tahoe City to Truckee via Squaw Valley, while a second peak-period bus is operated in the winter season only. The Complementary Paratransit Service is provided for persons with disabilities through a taxi contractor. In addition, TART operates summer-only rubber-tired trolley services along the North Shore and to Squaw Valley, in both daytime and evening periods. TART operates a total of 14 vehicles out of a modern operations facility located near State Route 89 three miles south of Truckee. In total, TART services carry approximately 284,000 one-way passenger-trips per year, of which 93 percent is generated by the two year-round fixed routes.

Ridership is particularly high on the North Shore route between Tahoe City and North Stateline, which carries just over half of all TART riders. Ridership has generally increased over the last ten years by 2.5 percent per year.

In addition, the Town of Truckee operates transit services in the study area. A fixed route “Truckee Trolley” is operated year-round from the Truckee Tahoe Airport to the West End of Donner Lake, with winter-only expansion to Donner Summit on the west and to Northstar-At-Tahoe, Tahoe Vista, and Kings Beach on the southeast. In addition, a two-van Dial-A-Ride service is operated year-round. All services are provided during daytime periods only. Annual ridership is approximately 57,000 on the Truckee Trolley routes, and 17,000 on the Dial-A-Ride service.

Other private and public services in the area include:

- Employee shuttle services operated to/from Reno by Northstar, Squaw Valley, Alpine Meadows and the Resort at Squaw Creek,
- Employee shuttle service operated from Incline Village by Alpine Meadows Ski Area,
- Skier shuttle services operated by Alpine Meadows, Squaw Valley USA, Homewood Mountain Resort, Diamond Peak Ski Area, as well as the *Tahoe Queen* ferry service operated from South Shore,
- Greyhound intercity service to the Truckee Train Station along the I-80 corridor,
- Amtrak *California Zephyr* daily rail service to the Truckee Train Station, and
- Reno-Tahoe International Airport Shuttle Services operated by the Resort at Squaw Creek, Granlibakken Resort, and No Stress Express.

EXISTING TRANSIT SHORTFALLS

- Services are limited or not well coordinated along the SR 267 corridor, or between this corridor and the remainder of the region.
- Public transit programs have only had limited success in attracting ridership from area visitors.
- While the demand for services vary substantially between route segments, existing service plans provide relatively consistent service levels. As a result, resources are not allocated in a manner that most effectively meets the demands of the region.
- Significant potential transit “markets” are not presently being served, including consistent year-round service along the length of the SR 267 corridor, and evening service (with the exception of the summer Trolley service).
- Service frequency is presently lacking, particularly along the Truckee River Corridor and along the North Shore.
- Service quality is marginal in terms of on-time performance. Traffic congestion problems are having a significant impact on service reliability, particularly in the summer.
- Peak period overcrowding of the buses is becoming a problem on the North Shore and Truckee routes.
- The attractiveness of transit service is hindered by the lack of consistent bus stop amenities throughout the region, and the limited network of continuous, plowed pedestrian routes.

SHORT-RANGE SERVICE PLAN

Given adequate operating funds, TART will pursue implementation of the following service improvements, by priority:

1. **Operate Summer and Winter Tripper Service From the North Shore to Squaw Valley** – TART would establish an additional morning bus run from North Stateline through Tahoe City to Squaw Valley during the summer and winter seasons, in order to address chronic overcrowding. This is currently being done on an informal basis, not reflected in the schedule.
2. **Improve Summer Service Frequency on the North Shore** – TART would double service frequency between Tahoe City and North Stateline during the summer season, from once every 60 minutes to once every 30 minutes, throughout the existing operating day. This would effectively replace the existing summer daytime Trolley service along the North Shore, which is currently providing this service over most of the service day.
3. **Improve Trolley Program**
 - Starting in the summer of 2004, service to Emerald Bay (the “Park Shuttle”) was eliminated. Daytime service is continuing between Tahoe City and North Stateline (alternating with TART service to provide effective 30-minute frequency service). The Sunnyside – Crystal Bay evening service has also been discontinued due to low ridership (2,626 passenger-trips over the course of the summer of 2003). Instead, two trolleys are operated on a one-hour headway from Squaw Valley to the Hyatt.
 - The half-hourly North Shore TART service planned to be provided would effectively replace the existing daytime North Shore Trolley service, allowing this service to be eliminated.
 - A “Tahoe City Trolley” summer service will be initiated, so long as a majority of funds are provided by the local business community and collected by or through the NLTRA.
 - A pilot trolley shuttle for the Tahoe Vista - to - North Stateline area is included in this plan, so long as a majority of funds are provided by or through the NLTRA. The specific priority of this improvement will depend upon local business operating funding.
 - With the planned expansion of TART Mainline services into the summer evening hours, one Trolley would still need to be operated between Tahoe City and North Stateline to provide effective half-hourly service. In addition, hourly Trolley service will be provided between Squaw Valley, Tahoe City and Sunnyside.
4. **Provide Hourly Winter Service Frequency on the Tahoe City – Truckee Route** – A detailed analysis indicates that the provision of hourly daytime service on this route (which has experienced a 46 percent increase in ridership over the last four years) in the winter is a transit need that is reasonable to meet. Winter hourly service using two buses operating from roughly 6:30 AM to 6:00 PM would be implemented, so long as funding principals can be met. Ridership on this improved service will be monitored to determine if further improvements in service frequency are warranted.
5. **Expand Year-Round Evening Transit Service on the North Shore by One Hour** – TART would operate one additional hour of service on the North Shore year-round, in order to accommodate an extended commute period.
6. **Expand Summer Evening Mainline Transit Service** – Evening service during the summer season would be extended throughout the Mainline Route until 10:00 PM. This would partially replace the existing evening Trolley service.

7. **Improve Service Frequency on the North Shore Year-Round** – TART would double service frequency between Tahoe City and North Stateline, from once every 60 minutes to once every 30 minutes, throughout the existing operating day in spring, summer and fall.
8. **Provide Tahoe City – Truckee Service Every 90 Minutes in Spring, Summer and Fall** – Once 30-minute service is provided on the North Shore, the frequency of service in the non-summer seasons would be increased using a single bus from roughly every 2 hours to every 90 minutes with a direct connection to North Shore service in Tahoe City on every run.
9. **Establish TART SR 267 Service Once the Martis Valley Community Services Area is Established** – The provision of public transit service along SR 267 between Kings Beach and Truckee is planned to become the responsibility of the TART program. This is appropriate given the fact that 87 percent of this route lies within Placer County, and that current and planned growth in Placer County will increase the need for future improvements in service. In the interim, the existing services provided along the corridor will remain unchanged, except for provision of a second winter peak-period bus operating between Northstar and Truckee that is required as a mitigation measure for the Northstar Village project. Placer County will conduct a focused study of transit needs and options in the Martis Valley area over the coming years that will be used to refine this service plan. As Priority #9, existing services would be assumed by TART. As Priority #10, TART would operate an additional bus in the winter season. As Priority #11, TART would also provide daytime service in the non-winter seasons every 90 minutes between Truckee and North Stateline, via Northstar-At-Tahoe.

In addition, the following non-prioritized service plan elements are included in this Plan. Again, these elements will require adequate funding and will need to be consistent with funding principals:

- Incline Village Service** (under the direction of the Washoe Regional Transportation Commission)
 - Half-hourly service provided along the North Shore in California would eliminate the lack of connecting service to and from California on half of the existing runs, aiding ridership.
 - Evening service in Nevada would be extended until 10:30 PM in the summer. This expansion in the span of service is forecast to generate roughly 4,800 additional passenger-trips annually.
 - Direct TART service to the Reynolds Center will be provided for the once-a-week food distribution program operated by Project MANA.
- Monitor the Potential Need to Eliminate Lake Forest Service** – The North Shore segment of the Mainline Route often requires more time to operate than is available in the schedule. While one means of addressing this would be to eliminate service along Lake Forest Road and instead operate the route along SR 28, this would also result in a loss of roughly 600 passenger-trips per year as well as loss in direct service to an important social service program. If the provision of half-hourly service does not result in adequate performance, this route modification should be considered.
- Monitor Need for a North Shore Circulator Route, Including Service to National Avenue** – While it is not feasible to modify existing TART services to serve new areas in Kings Beach and Tahoe Vista area, there are areas that could benefit from transit service. In 2006 (and after installation of a traffic signal at SR 28 / National Avenue) the TRPA and appropriate regional partners will conduct a limited study regarding the provision of a North

Shore Circulator Route that could serve the northern portions of Tahoe Vista and Kings Beach, as well as provide higher frequency service along SR 28 in these communities.

- ❑ **Provide TART Service on Christmas Day** – In the short-term, TART will provide service on Christmas Day and stop providing service on Thanksgiving Day instead, thereby providing service in the winter tourist season without increasing costs. In the longer term, TART will provide service all days of the year.
- ❑ **ADA Service** – The Complementary Paratransit Service program operated by a private taxi firm under contract to TART will continue.
- ❑ **Reno – Truckee – North Tahoe Transit Service** – TART will consider the management of the year-round Reno – Truckee – North Tahoe demonstration transit program planned to be implemented starting as early as December of 2005. In addition, TART could potentially prepare a bid to operate the service, for comparison with competitive bids received from other transit operators. This service will operate three buses in the winter season, and one bus in the other seasons, along the I-80 and SR 89 corridors between Reno, Truckee and Tahoe City, with connecting winter service between Truckee and Northstar operated by Northstar-At-Tahoe.

SHORT-RANGE CAPITAL PLAN

- ❑ **Fleet Replacement and Changes to Address Needs of Operating Plan** – Four existing buses will be replaced over the SRTP period. One new bus will be required to provide SR 267 service. To ensure that a well-maintained wheelchair-accessible vehicle is available for the CPS service, TART will purchase and maintain a small accessible van. In addition, four 40-foot buses are planned to be provided by the Tahoe Transportation District for the Reno – Truckee – North Tahoe service to be potentially managed by the TART program.
- ❑ **Improved Bus Stop Maintenance** – TART should consider contracting with a private local maintenance firm to provide this service, averaging ten hours of personnel time per week.
- ❑ **Improved Vehicle Cleanliness** – The exterior of in-service vehicles will be washed twice per week, while interiors will be swept daily and detailed weekly, using existing staff.
- ❑ **TART Cabin Creek Facility Improvements** – Eight additional outside bus/trolley parking spaces, additional employee parking spaces, and additional maintenance bays for Road Department and general fleet equipment (to allow for expansion of bus maintenance in the existing facility) will be required.
- ❑ **Bus Stop Improvements** – In total, shelters are planned at eleven new locations, and benches provided at an additional eleven locations. As funding permits, TART will strive to provide lighting for existing shelters and stops
- ❑ **Tahoe City Transit Center** – Placer County is preparing a revised version of the environmental document for an environmental analysis of a proposed transit center in Tahoe City. Construction is planned to be initiated by 2006, pending approvals.
- ❑ **North Stateline Bus Stop Improvements** – A second bus bay should be constructed on the north side of SR 28 in North Stateline to accommodate the SR 267 bus.

- ❑ **Implement a “Smart Card” Fare System** – TART will implement a “smart card” fare system. Existing TART fareboxes will be replaced with electronic fareboxes, speeding boarding times, reducing operating costs, and allowing improved data collection.
- ❑ **Pursue Funding for an Automated Vehicle Location System** – Beginning in 2005, TART will work with regional partners to pursue a grant for an Automatic Vehicle Location system to aid in the coordination of services and in providing real-time passenger information.
- ❑ **Achieve Bicycle / Pedestrian Improvements Around Bus Stops** – TART will work with other regional partners to improve pedestrian and bicycle access to bus stops.

SHORT-RANGE INSTITUTIONAL AND MANAGEMENT PLAN

- ❑ **Provide Ongoing Driver Training** – Each TART driver shall have a minimum of eight hours annually of ongoing driver training.
- ❑ **Adopt Transit Goals, Objectives, and Performance Measures** – A series of performance measures are included to guide future decisionmaking regarding service modifications.
- ❑ **Investigate Maintenance of Town of Truckee Transit Vehicles by Placer County DPW Staff and Office Space for the Town’s Service Contractor at Cabin Creek** – Placer County DPW will contact the Town of Truckee to investigate the feasibility of providing maintenance services for the Town’s transit vehicles at Cabin Creek using DPW staff, as well as provision of office space and vehicle storage.
- ❑ **Consider Adding One Additional Placer County Transit Program Administrative Position** – Implementing this Plan will require a substantial increase in transit management responsibilities. Parallel studies for the Placer County Transit system in the western portion of the county also indicate a need for additional management resources. A single new position could be established to be shared between the two programs.
- ❑ **Increase TART Maintenance Staff** – Implementation of this Plan will require allocation of additional maintenance staff resources for TART bus maintenance.
- ❑ **Improve Marketing Efforts** – A variety of marketing efforts are identified, including improved internet transit information, regional marketing strategies, and focused marketing for new services, as outlined in the Regional Transit Marketing Plan.
- ❑ **Improve Service Monitoring** – As a management tool, TART staff will prepare monthly and quarterly service monitoring reports.
- ❑ **Establish a County Service Area (CSA) District for Martis Valley** – Depending upon the final results of the detailed study of transit services for the Martis Valley and Board of Supervisors approval, Placer County will establish a County Service Area special district encompassing the developable portions of the Martis Valley area in unincorporated Placer County. Funds generated by the CSA will be used to support transit services serving the CSA area.

FINANCIAL PLAN

- ❑ **Adjust Fares on a Regular Basis to Keep Pace with Inflation** – beginning July 1, 2004, TART has raised the base fare to \$1.50 to address cost increases, and reduced fares for elderly, persons with disabilities, and youth as required by the Federal Transit Administration.
- ❑ **Provide Fare-Free Fixed-Route Service for ADA-Eligible Passengers** – This will encourage passengers to use the more efficient fixed-route services over the CPS program, resulting in an overall reduction in subsidy needs.
- ❑ **Reduce the Minimum Required Farebox Ratio in the Tahoe Region** – TRPA will investigate and implement a reduction in the minimum required farebox ratio applied to TART services within the Tahoe Region.
- ❑ **Provide Operating Funding Through Existing and New Sources** – If all of the recommended service improvements are implemented, the total annual operating costs required for TART service would be increase by roughly \$888,200, while subsidy requirements would be increased by \$724,600 per year. The following sources will be used to generate operating revenues:
 - Farebox revenues.
 - Local Transportation Funds (LTF) funding received through the TRPA.
 - LTF funds received through PCTPA.
 - State Transit Assistance (STA) funding received through the TRPA.
 - No STA funding is assumed to be received through the PCTPA.
 - FTA Section 5311 funds.
 - Washoe RTC will be relied upon to fund the subsidy requirements associated with service in Washoe County.
 - Based on existing agreements and funding limitations, the Town of Truckee is assumed to contribute funds towards SR 89 Corridor service between Truckee and Tahoe City.
 - Per the mitigation measure identified in the Northstar Village EIR, the developer of Northstar Village is required to fund 50 percent of the cost of two additional winter daily rounds trips between Truckee and North Tahoe on the SR 267 corridor.
 - The Martis Valley Community Services Area is assumed to fund the subsidy requirements associated with SR 267 Corridor service beginning in Fiscal Year 2006-07.
 - Contract revenue, including funds provided by the NLTRA and private contributors for Trolley services, are assumed to continue, though these funding levels will change as the scope and subsidy requirements of the Trolley program are reduced. Funds currently provided for North Shore summer trolley services that will be replaced by bus service expansion are assumed to continue to be provided to TART for these services.
 - Existing lease revenues are assumed to continue.
 - TART will pursue a program of exterior bus advertising, in order to generate additional much-needed local operating funds.
 - TRPA is currently working to make the Tahoe Region eligible for FTA Section 5307 Urbanized Area Funds.
 - If the Reno-Truckee-North Tahoe program is operated through TART, additional funding sources would be tapped.

- ❑ **Provide Capital Revenues Through Existing and New Sources** – Capital costs over the five-year period will total approximately \$3,831,300. Funding for TART capital programs over the five-year Plan period will be generated from the following sources:
 - Federal Transit Administration Section 5309 and 5310 funds
 - The Sacramento Emergency Clean Air and Transportation (SECAT) program
 - TRPA Air Quality and Water Quality funds
 - The Washoe RTC
 - The Tahoe Transportation District
 - The Rural Transit System Grant Program
 - The North Lake Tahoe Resort Association
 - The Martis Valley County Service Area
 - Placer County LTF
 - Placer County Traffic Impact Fee Program

- ❑ If the **Reno – Truckee – North Tahoe** service is initiated, additional operating and capital funding sources would be accessed.

Capital revenues balance with capital expenditures in each of the five Plan years.

Placer County Funding Principals

While the service expansion elements of the plan are not fully funded, there is some additional revenue that is reasonably foreseeable for TART service. The statements below outline Placer County's funding strategy and policy for this plan.

- ❑ Continue funding baseline TART service with the existing funding sources.
- ❑ Jurisdictions that benefit from TART service to and within their boundaries will fund a fair share of that service. Funding partnerships with private sector partners should also be considered.
- ❑ 100% of the Placer County TDA apportionment from TRPA will continue to be used to fund TART service within the Placer County portion of the Tahoe Basin.
- ❑ TDA funds from the PCTPA apportionment will continue to be used for the baseline service provided on Highway 89 along with funding from other entities.
- ❑ Any additional funds generated by the baseline TART service as an enterprise, such as advertising, charters, fuel sales, or lease revenues for the TART facility will go towards funding the baseline TART service.
- ❑ Before any additional ongoing funding contributions are made to expanded transit service, Placer County should consider the following:
 - The contribution does not reduce or replace baseline funding;
 - All baseline funding remains in place;
 - Ongoing and sufficient funding to cover the added operating costs for future years; and
 - The expanded service is consistent with the priorities identified in this plan.
- ❑ Transit service expansions that meet “reasonable to meet” standards pursuant to the TDA will be implemented by Placer County in a timely manner. TDA funding for transit service that is not addressed in the TDA Unmet Transit Needs process will be considered on a case by case basis and should also consider consistency with the plan and non-TDA source contributions.

INTERMODAL CONNECTIVITY PLAN

This Plan section discusses the need for connectivity between different portions of the region as well as regional access portals.

Truckee Train Station – The most significant potential expansion in intercity public transportation services to the region is the possible extension of the *Capitol Corridor* rail service westward of Auburn to Truckee and Reno. If efforts to institute this service are successful, a crucial component will be the provision of connecting bus services from the Truckee Train Station to the various resort and residential areas in the region. Several elements presented in this TART Plan will expand public transit connections to the Truckee Train Station, including the expansion of TART services into the SR 267 corridor and the increased frequency of service.

Reno – Tahoe International Airport – The Reno – Truckee – North Tahoe service, to be potentially administered by TART, will provide reasonably convenient public transit service between North Tahoe / Truckee and the airport, via a direct transfer to RTC Citifare Route 13 at the CitiCenter transit hub in downtown Reno. Direct service to the airport from North Tahoe / Truckee will remain largely a role of private shuttle services for the foreseeable future.

Connections Between North Tahoe, Squaw/Alpine, Martis Valley and Truckee – In terms of total potential transit demand, the most important regional transit connection is between eastern Placer County (including the Tahoe Basin portion) and the Truckee area. TART has already made a good start towards serving this connection via the Tahoe City – Truckee service. In addition, this Plan will strengthen connections between these areas through the provision of consistent services along the SR 267 corridor between Truckee and North Stateline and improvement of Tahoe City – Truckee service to hourly frequency.

Connections Between North Shore and Reno/Sparks – Transit service between the Truckee / North Tahoe Region and Reno/Sparks is increasingly important for employment trips in particular, as well as for shopping, medical, and other personal business reasons. TART could be a key element in establishing service on this corridor by management of the demonstration program.

Connections Between North Shore and South Shore – While not as an important overall transit corridor as service between North Shore and Truckee, the provision of public transit service between Tahoe's North and South Shores would help to achieve regional goals. There is a potentially viable market for a summer-only transit service connecting the North and South Shores, and possibly providing round-the-lake service. Establishment of a summer-only round-the-lake public transit service should be a long-term goal of the Tahoe Region.

Connections Between Incline Village / North Stateline and Carson City – A two-runs-a-day commute service for Carson City residents working in Incline Village and North Stateline is warranted. TART services in the North Shore area can support this new connection by providing local circulation to and from the commuter bus stops.

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