

Memo



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Date: July 24, 2017
To: Joint Fact Finding Committee
From: Ascent Environmental
Subject: Shoreline Plan EIS – Proposed Scenic Analysis Approach

This memo summarizes the proposed approach for preparing the scenic resources chapter of the EIS for the Shoreline Plan, which incorporates input provided by the Joint Fact Findings Committee at the May 10, 2017 meeting.

The EIS will evaluate the effect of each Shoreline Plan alternative on scenic resources as defined by the TRPA scenic resource threshold standards. TRPA has three scenic resource threshold categories, all of which could be affected by the Shoreline Plan alternatives: Roadways and Shoreline Units, Other Areas, and Built Environment. The Roadways and Shoreline Units category requires that TRPA maintain and restore scenic quality in each roadway and shoreline travel unit established in the Region. Each of these travel units, and individual scenic resources within each travel unit, must achieve a minimum numerical composite scenic score and, at a minimum, maintain the composite scenic score that was assigned when the unit was first inventoried. The Other Areas reporting category requires that TRPA maintain or improve the numerical composite scenic score assigned to specific bicycle paths and recreation areas. The Built Environment reporting category is a policy statement that directs TRPA to “...ensure the height, bulk, texture, form, materials, colors, lighting, signing and other design elements of new, remodeled and redeveloped buildings be compatible with the natural, scenic, and recreational values of the region.”

Any effect that would reduce the ability to attain or maintain the scenic resource thresholds would be considered a significant impact. The EIS will incorporate baseline scenic quality information from the 2015 Threshold Evaluation and the scenic evaluation methodology that has been consistently applied to measure changes in scenic quality for each threshold evaluation. The EIS will include feasible mitigation measures for any significant impact(s). The scenic chapter will include two primary sections: Setting, and Environmental Impacts and Mitigation Measures, as described below.

Setting

This section will summarize laws, regulations, and policies that apply to scenic quality in the region. It will provide an overview of concepts and terms related to scenic quality, and describe the TRPA thresholds, including applicable standards and evaluation approaches.

The setting will also summarize the existing scenic quality at Lake Tahoe, including maps and tables to depict the status and trends of scenic thresholds. This section will describe elements that contribute

positively to, and that detract from scenic quality in the shoreline, with an emphasis on those elements that could be affected by the alternatives (e.g., pier length, number of structures, buoy density). It will include representative photographs and maps to depict the existing shoreline character types.

Environmental Impacts and Mitigation Measures

The Environmental Impacts and Mitigation Measures section will evaluate the Shoreline Plan alternatives to determine if implementation of the alternatives would result in a significant impact related to scenic quality. Because the scenic quality analysis in the 2004 Shorezone EIS was comprehensive and withstood legal challenge, this analysis will incorporate methods from the 2004 EIS, as appropriate. It is assumed that the alternatives would not result in substantial new sources of light or glare, or changes to lighting standards; and a detailed analysis of light and glare would not be required. The analysis will evaluate the following potential impacts of the Shoreline Plan alternatives at and equal level of detail for all alternatives:

Alter Views of the Shore from Lake Tahoe

This impact will consider whether the number, location, and design of new or rebuilt shoreline structures allowed under each alternative would degrade scenic views toward the shoreline from the lake, such that they could result in a decrease in the numeric rating of any component of the composite scenic score for shoreline travel units and/or for individual TRPA-designated scenic resources within shoreline travel units.

This analysis will quantify the number and expected location of new shoreline structures under each alternative; including maps depicting build-out scenarios for each alternative. It will include a matrix that summarizes the expected number of new shoreline structures within each shoreline character type (i.e., Natural Dominated, Visually Sensitive, Visually Modified, Visually Dominated), and shoreline travel unit. The matrix will identify locations where new structures could be built in shoreline travel units that are not in attainment of the scenic threshold standards.

The analysis will then identify the travel units where new structures have the greatest potential to decrease shoreline composite scores, based on the following criteria: 1) shoreline travel unit attainment status (particularly those units for which shoreline development has been identified as a factor limiting threshold attainment in previous threshold evaluations), 2) shoreline character types, and 3) the number and type of expected new structures (including private and public piers). Once the travel units most likely to be degraded by shoreline development have been identified, the build-out scenarios and existing visual characteristics of those travel units will be reviewed to identify the individual viewpoints that have the greatest potential to be degraded by new and redeveloped shoreline structures.

Up to four viewpoints will be selected to reflect the views most likely to be degraded by new and rebuilt shoreline development. Visual simulations depicting build-out will be prepared for each viewpoint under each of the four alternatives. The simulations will reflect design standards and the implementation of proposed scenic protections and/or offsets required under each alternative. The simulations will reflect a worst-case scenario by assuming that each new structure would result in the greatest visual change allowed under each alternative (e.g., maximum pier length, maximum buoy density, greatest visual mass). The simulations will also reflect visual changes from other structures likely to occur under each alternative (e.g., swim platforms), and will reflect the maximum allowable redevelopment of existing shoreline structures consistent with the provisions of each alternative. Because lake level can influence the visibility and visual impact of structures, the simulations will reflect views with average lake levels, and the analysis will include a discussion on the effects of lake level.

The visual changes shown in the simulations will be described, noting elements of structures under each alternative that improve and detract from scenic quality. Changes to the unity, vividness, variety, and

intactness of each view will be evaluated and described. New numeric composite scenic scores will be prepared for each simulation. The scenic scores will be calculated consistent with the threshold evaluation methodology to develop a score for each component of the composite score: 1) man-made features along the shoreline, 2) general landscape views within the shoreline unit, and 3) variety of scenery within the shoreline unit. The scenic scores calculated for each simulation will then be compared to the existing scenic scores for that viewpoint, as documented in the 2015 Threshold Evaluation, to determine if build-out of the alternatives would reduce scenic scores at the viewpoints that have the greatest potential to be degraded by implementation of the shoreline alternatives.

Alter Views of Lake Tahoe

This impact will consider whether the number, location, and design of new or rebuilt shoreline structures allowed under each alternative would degrade scenic views of Lake Tahoe from roadways, bicycle trails, or recreation areas, such that they could result in a decrease in numeric composite scenic scores.

This analysis will quantify the number and expected location of new shoreline structures under each alternative, including maps depicting build-out scenarios for each alternative. The maps will identify locations where new structures could be built adjacent to roadway travel units, roadway scenic resources, bicycle trails, or recreation areas that are not in attainment of the scenic threshold standards.

This impact will then identify three viewpoints where new structures have the greatest potential to decrease numeric shoreline composite scores for roadway travel units, roadway scenic resources, bicycle trails, or recreation areas. The viewpoints will be selected based on a review of build-out scenarios, a review of existing scenic resource inventories, and a field survey to determine the visibility of areas where the greatest number of new structures are expected to occur. It is anticipated that two viewpoints will reflect views from roadway travel units and/or roadway scenic resources, and one viewpoint will reflect views from a recreation area or bicycle trail included in TRPA's inventory of scenic resources.

Visual simulations depicting build-out will be prepared for each of the three viewpoints under each alternative. The simulations will reflect design standards and the implementation of proposed scenic protections and/or offsets required under each alternative. The simulations will reflect a worst-case scenario by assuming that each new structure would result in the greatest visual change allowed under each alternative (e.g., maximum pier length, maximum buoy density, greatest visual mass). The simulations will also reflect visual changes from other structures (e.g., swim platforms) as appropriate, and will reflect the maximum allowable redevelopment of existing shoreline structures consistent with the provisions of each alternative. Simulations will be prepared to illustrate conditions under average lake levels.

The visual changes shown in the simulations will be described noting elements under each alternative that improve and detract from the scenic quality of lake views when viewed from the shore. Changes to the unity, vividness, variety, and intactness of each view will be evaluated and described. New numeric composite scenic scores will be prepared for each simulation, consistent with the threshold evaluation methodology. The scenic scores calculated for each simulation will be compared to the existing scenic scores for that viewpoint to determine if the alternative would result in scenic degradation.

Character of the Built Environment

This impact will determine whether, based on design characteristics, new or redeveloped shoreline structures would be compatible with the natural and recreational character of the region. This impact would evaluate whether the colors, materials, texture and other design characteristics of shoreline structures allowed under each alternative would result in an aesthetic character that is not compatible with its surroundings. The analysis will include a review of the proposed shoreline design standards under each alternative, including those for color, material, and architectural standards. It will also consider whether

structures designed to comply with visual magnitude and other scenic resource protection standards could have unintended effects that would result in an incompatible aesthetic (e.g., an industrial appearance, or materials that contrast with the surrounding built environment).