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# HOMEFRONT

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Transportation issues are key concerns with any development proposal, and particularly so in an area as environmentally sensitive as Lake Tahoe. Increasing economic vitality to ensure the continued viability of the *Homewood Mountain Resort* generally means changing the travel patterns of persons traveling to, from and within the Homewood area. The impact that these changes will have on the area is probably the number one concern of area residents. This edition of Homefront focuses on transportation conditions in the area and potential strategies to achieve improvements.



## EXISTING TRANSPORTATION CONDITIONS

Transportation conditions can be generally summarized as follows:

- Traffic conditions in the immediate Homewood area are relatively good, with only minimal delays for drivers. In addition, traffic volumes in the Homewood area have been declining in recent years – Caltrans counts of the average daily traffic volume in the month of August for SR 89 in Homewood peaked at 13,700 vehicles per day in 1999. In comparison, the 2005 value was 10,900, a 20 percent reduction.
  - The summer traffic problem on SR 89 at Fanny Bridge, however, is very serious. Due to a combination of high traffic volumes, pedestrians crossing the road and all those “fannies” on Fanny Bridge, north-bound traffic queues form during the middle of busy summer days
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that can stretch back a mile or more, and result in delays of 30 minutes or more. Traffic levels at Fanny Bridge, moreover, have increased from a 1999 peak month average daily traffic volume of 26,500 to a 2005 volume of 27,500.

- Parking along the shoulder of SR 89 is an issue in both summer and winter. In summer, boat trailers and their towing vehicles park along the shoulders, while on peak winter ski days skiers park along both highway shoulders as well as on local streets.

- Public transit services in Homewood are limited, particularly in comparison with services provided in other resort areas. The TART service provided by Placer County is limited to hourly service (daytime only) seven days a week year-round between Sugar Pine Point State Park (Meeks Bay in Summer) and Tahoe City. Approximately 21,500 passengers are carried by TART services each year, and ridership has been growing over recent years. In the summer of 1997, the U.S. Forest Service also operated a free transit service between Tahoe City and Emerald Bay every two hours, which carried 4,400 passengers

over the season. Limited winter evening service has also been initiated in the winter season under a program administered by the Truckee – North Tahoe Transportation Management Association.

- Non-motorized facilities in the area consist of the paved multi-use West Shore Trail. This facility, maintained by the Tahoe City Public Utility District, connects Tahoe City with Sugar Pine Point State Park, but there is a substantial gap in the Homewood area. There is also a short section of sidewalk along SR 89 opposite the North Lodge area.

## POTENTIAL TRANSPORTATION IMPROVEMENTS

Addressing transportation issues in an appropriate and positive way is the key to the Homewood Mountain Resort Master Plan. The goal is to implement development plans and transportation improvements that yield a net benefit to transportation conditions in the West Shore, even when considering the traffic generated by new project land uses. Individual strategies under consideration include the following:

- **Capping Ski Area Ticket Sales –** By limiting ticket sales, skier parking and traffic conditions can be managed to remain within desired limits. For instance, day skier ticket sales can be limited to not exceed the off-street parking provided by the Resort, thereby eliminating the existing peak ski day shoulder parking.

- **Increasing the Proportion of Skiers Waking Up near the Ski Hill –** Homewood Mountain Resort lodging guests and second home owners will tend to travel to and from Homewood in periods other than the day skier peak periods. These guests and homeowners will tend to stay longer and will replace the “commuter” skiers who must travel to and from Homewood via automobile daily to ski. With limits on the number of skiers, these on-site lodging and residential units will increase the proportion of skiers accessing the lifts by walking and reduce daily automobile trips.

- **Winter HMR Dial-A-Ride Service to West Shore Residential Areas –** One particularly intriguing option would be to operate a Dial-a-Ride service during peak ski days,

such as weekends and holidays, between West Shore residential areas and the ski area. This is similar to the existing summertime service provided by Chamberlands to Chambers Landing beach. As shown by the successful shuttle system at Northstar-at-Tahoe, which carries 22 percent of travel to and from the Northstar ski base area, a convenient shuttle program can make a real difference in traffic and parking issues.

For a Homewood DAR service, a reasonable operating plan would be to operate three passenger vans with ski racks, providing service from 8:00 a.m. to 6:30 p.m. A reasonable service area would encompass residences from Tahoma on the south to Granlibakken on the north (excluding the Talmont and Upper Ward Canyon areas).

Within this service area, residents and visitors could call for pick-ups for service to the HMR base area. Service could generally be provided within 15 minutes of a request. For major lodging centers, such as Sunnyside or Granlibakken, a specific schedule of service times could be established in order to better group passengers. In the opposite direction, specific departure times from the base areas would be established, such as once every half hour, with passengers simply telling the driver their desired destination. Potential ridership on the Homewood DAR service is estimated to be 260 daily one-way passenger trips, which would eliminate roughly 142 auto trips on the roadways or 71 parked cars from the parking lots.

- **Summer Boat Trailer Parking on Skier Lots** – A portion of the HMR south base parking lot could be used as boat trailer parking areas during the summer, reducing the impacts that boat trailers have along the public roadways. This program would be focused on the daily boater who currently launches at Obexer’s Marina and parks along SR 89, often blocking driveways and creating noise and dust problems. A valet system could be initiated to shuttle vehicles and trailers to the south base parking area to reduce and/or possibly restrict trailer parking along SR 89.
- **North Lodge / South Lodge Shuttle Service** – The existing van shuttle between the two lodge areas could be replaced with a service on an alternate route off the state highway, possibly incorporating green technologies to further reduce environmental impacts. The owners of



Homewood are currently exploring the development of a small, pulse gondola at the base of the mountain to carry visitors and guests between the north and south base lodges. This new transportation system would significantly reduce vehicular traffic on SR 89, which currently is the only method of transporting individuals between the base lodges.

- **Commercial Land Uses** – It is currently contemplated that the modestly sized village center that will be developed under the master plan will include new retail uses that are aimed at serving the local community. Based on input received to date from local residents, the owners of Homewood are planning for both a hardware and a grocery store. The re-establishment of these services in Homewood will reduce the need for vehicular travel to Tahoe City and other retail locations for purchase of food and household items.
- **Expansion of Summer Public Transit Service to Half-Hourly Headways** – Expansion of summer TART service to half-hourly headways would increase the convenience of public transit. This strategy is forecast to serve 5,500 transit passengers per year, and reduce traffic volumes by roughly 40 vehicle-trips on a busy summer day.
- **Employee Shuttle Service** – An employee shuttle service could supplement the existing TART service by providing two round-trips during winter commute hours and one-round trip over the summer season. An HMR employee shuttle could potentially provide 80 one-way passenger trips on peak winter days and 40 one-way passenger trips on peak summer days, and could reduce daily one-way vehicle trips by 28 on a peak winter day and 14 on a peak summer day.

- **Summer “Water Taxi” Service –** Another particularly intriguing option would be to provide a “water taxi” service using a smaller (10-30 passenger capacity) boat between Homewood, Tahoe City, and potentially Sunnyside. This service would bypass summer seasonal traffic congestion at Fanny Bridge and the Tahoe City Y, and could also serve as an enjoyable outing for visitors staying on the West Shore who wish to visit Tahoe City or vice versa. A good example of a successful water taxi service is the River Otter, operated between Old Sacramento and the Garden Highway area upstream on the Sacramento River, which carries

roughly 18,000 passengers per season (April through October). A reasonable operating plan for a West Shore Water Taxi would be to provide a single vessel, with stops in Homewood, Sunnyside, and Tahoe City, from roughly 9:30 a.m. through 6:30 p.m., and from roughly June 15 through Labor Day. This is estimated to generate a ridership of 170 one-way passenger trips per day, which would eliminate 60 vehicle-trips daily.

- **Bicycle / Pedestrian Facilities –** As part of the redevelopment of the North Lodge area, pedestrian and bicycle facilities will be extended north from the current terminus

at Fawn Street northward to Sacramento Avenue.

- **Transportation Information Strategies –** Providing accurate, “real time” information to HMR travelers can also help to reduce transportation problems. Information on parking/lift ticket availability, non-auto transportation options, and Fanny Bridge traffic congestion can encourage travelers to make travel decisions that reduce auto impacts. This information could be provided through the Internet, text messaging, in-room or front desk displays, or low-wattage driver advisory radio.

## SUMMARY

The Homewood Master Plan is being constructed on a foundation of innovative, creative, and viable transportation and parking initiatives that are aimed at the improvement of lifestyles for local residents and visitors. Quite simply, skier and guest parking will be located on the Homewood property, and when those parking spaces are full, no more lift tickets will be sold. There will be no more parking in front of driveways and blocking of intersections. The dial-a-ride program will be aimed at local residents and will offer a convenient and friendly way to commute to and from

Homewood without having to use the automobile. In summer months, parking facilities will be offered for boat trailer parking in an attempt to get vehicles and trailers off SR 89. We certainly welcome the input and suggestions of area residents for additional improvements.

If Homewood is to again become the village center of the West Shore, it has to have the support of local residents and homeowners. We cannot state in strong enough terms how much we welcome and encourage your input.

### Article by Gordon R. Shaw, PE, AICP

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NEXT EDITION: SUSTAINABILITY AND CONSERVATION



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