



Map, indicates the location of the summit terminal for Lift 21 in the upper left corner. The lift's lower terminal is situated in the back bowls, providing access to the Two Elk summit lodge and shelter. This location directs recreational traffic toward Golden Peak and Vail Village ski base areas. The lift 21 capacity expansion aligns with the 2024 United States Forest Service and Vail Resorts, Inc. (VRI) Vail Master Development Plan, which also includes the proposed Trans Montane Lift. The base of this lift would be located in a private parking lot on the west side of the Mill Creek Circle residential neighborhood near Gondola One in Vail Village.

Letters to Vail

VHA Report:

Public Notice: USFS Request for Comment RE: Lift Capacity Expansion May 30, 2025

As part of its review of the 2025 Vail Mountain construction projects, the United States Forest Service reports that Vail Resorts (VR) is proposing to replace the existing Chair 21—a detachable quad chairlift with a capacity of 2,400 people per hour (pph). The new lift, still located in the same place, would be a detachable six-person chairlift with a capacity of 3,600 pph, increasing the current capacity by 1,200 pph. The goal of this upgrade is to reduce congestion in lift lines and improve visitor distribution throughout VR's facilities on Vail Mountain.

Lift capacity expansion across Vail Mountain will impact the investment in facilities and services provided by the Town of Vail (TOV), the United States Forest Service (USFS), and Vail Resorts (VR).

[The United States Forest Service \(USFS\) is seeking public comments on the proposed capacity expansion of Lift 21 and other planned mountain improvements.](#) The USFS notice for public comment fails to consider the effects on Town of Vail residents. Additionally, VR's proposed lift expansions lack a timeline, making it difficult—if not impossible—for TOV to forecast its investment needs in alignment with mountain developments. This lack of coordination increases investor hesitancy to support worthwhile proposals.

While the Forest Service prefers comments be submitted by June 6, 2025, relevant and applicable feedback should be accepted throughout the review process. The [Vail Homeowners Association \(VHA\) encourages affected residential property owners to voice their concerns in accordance with the linked USFS public notice](#). Electronic comments can be submitted via email to SM.FS.COMMENTS.R2.WHITERIVER@usda.gov.



(Center) Location of Lift 21 in the back bowls, aka, the Orient Express Lift.

Complaints about congested lift lines in the back bowls peaked during the pandemic due to an unanticipated surge in consumer demand. Recently, [congestion was cited in a report by a stockholder, as well as in various media articles, criticizing VR's limited investments in its existing resort holdings while prioritizing new acquisitions](#).

The impacts of the proposed lift expansions must be weighed against the mountain capacity limitations established in an Agreement between the Town of Vail (TOV), the United States Forest Service (USFS), and Vail Resorts (VR) during the late 1990s Blue Sky Basin expansion. [That agreement set a daily on-mountain usage limit of 19,900 visitors. The 2025 capacity increase for Lift 21 is part of a broader 2024 mountain-wide lift expansion designed to accommodate an additional 5,000 daily visitors on Vail Mountain.](#) The [2018 Environmental Impact Statement](#) indicated that new lift and terrain development would likely not exceed the 19,900-visitor management plan.

The Vail Homeowners Association (VHA) is concerned about traffic management related to [alleviating periodic vehicular and pedestrian congestion on Vail Valley Drive and its tributary roads](#). Intermingling resort-related vehicular and pedestrian traffic in residential neighborhoods raises privacy and public safety concerns. [Congestion negatively impacts access to residential neighborhoods adjoining the Golden Peak and Vail Village ski base facilities.](#) Of particular concern is the proposed Trans Mountain lift near Mill Creek Circle, which has implications for Tract E, a covenant-protected parcel of publicly accessible open space owned by VR with a history of legal disputes over noncompliant uses.

The statement acknowledges that traffic increases will occur along Vail Valley Drive between the Golden Peak ski base and the Vail Village parking and transportation center. However, assumptions change over time. An updated analysis of vehicular and pedestrian traffic flow data is recommended. This update would help mitigate

the cumulative effects on the TOV caused by the incremental implementation of lift capacity expansions outlined in the [2024 Vail Master Development Plan](#) (MDP). Balancing traffic distribution among the community's proposed and existing base areas is an ongoing process. A joint plan between the TOV, VR, and USFS, is needed to align the timing and scale of investments required to implement the 2024 MDP in coordination with [TOV's 2024 Mobility and related Master Plans](#).

The TOV is currently analyzing the feasibility of [expanding mass transportation services](#) at the Vail Village Transportation Center to help alleviate traffic congestion. The project is designed to avoid the demolition and reconstruction of the Town's aging parking structures in Vail Village and Lionshead, as the Town is not currently in a financial position to replace the nearly 50-year-old facilities.

Incremental approvals obscure the full implications of capacity increases and the community's investment needs. Incremental steps also allow for avoiding an update to the 2018 Environmental Impact Statement. Updating the impact database could be crucial in determining whether the 19,900-visitor limit is being exceeded. If limits are found to be surpassed, the Blue Sky Basin Agreement requires the TOV, VR, and the USFS to revise their managed growth agreements. These revisions could necessitate developing a strategy to accumulate millions in public and private investment dollars to address growth impacts with workforce housing and transportation needs being top priorities.

VHA [invites letters of interest](#) to assist in its membership and reader development efforts.

VHA is a member and reader-supported non-profit funded by voluntary annual dues and contributions of its paid subscribers and readers. Many members are part-time resident property owners from Vail's founding generation, their children, and succeeding generations of first-time owners who have discovered the intangible qualities that Vail brings to their lives. As Vail grows, traditional assumptions of political activism have become more complicated and costly.

Memberships and contributions fuel the VHA Reports, Letters to Vail, and help VHA respond to important issues, expand its reach, and ensure transparency. VHA is thankful for the support and participation of the Vail community. We pledge to remain at the forefront of advocating for the mutual interests of full and part-time residents and property owners.

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