

For Immediate Release
January 25, 2017

Contact: Jon Christensen, UCLA Institute of the Environment and Sustainability,
650-759-6534, jonchristensen@ioes.ucla.edu

Report: The Cost of Visiting the Coast Keeps Many Californians Away
Delivering on California's promise of "access for all" will require
more public transportation options, affordable parking,
and lower-cost overnight accommodations

Los Angeles, CA – Billionaires blocking beach access regularly garner headlines in California. But a new report from UCLA's Institute of the Environment and Sustainability and San Francisco State University finds that the costs of travel, parking, and overnight accommodations are also major factors preventing Californians from visiting the coast as often as they would like, especially low income Californians and people who live in inland areas of the state.

California has long been a leader in coastal protection and public access. The state constitution first recognized that coastal tidelands belong to the people of California in 1849. In 1972 California voters created a system of coastal management to protect access to the coast, and in 1976, the California legislature built upon that foundation with the landmark Coastal Act, which mandates that "maximum access" to the coast "be provided for all the people." But, while all people have the right to visit the coast, on the 40th anniversary of the Coastal Act real barriers remain for most Californians.

The UCLA report, entitled "Access for All: A New Generation's Challenges on the California Coast," includes new results from a statewide voter poll and a series of southern California beach surveys, as well as a new analysis of economic barriers to access. The analysis probes why 62 percent of California voters told a recent poll that access is a problem, and even more said limited affordable options for parking and overnight stays and limited public transportation are problems in the parts of the California coast nearest to them.

"This new research shows that we are at a tipping point where deciding to visit the coast is a close call for most Californians, given the cost," said Jon Christensen, lead investigator for the study at UCLA's Institute of the Environment and Sustainability. "We found Californians value our public beaches as a place to gather with friends and family, enjoy nature, and relax, but the expense of getting to the coast and staying there is close to prohibitive for many families, making the coast inaccessible to many ordinary people."

The researchers found that California voters on average are willing to pay about \$118 per night for lodging on the coast. Yet the average cost of an economy room on the California coast during the summer ranges from \$135 to \$260 a night, the California Coastal Commission found in a survey of coastal cities last year. The commission also reported that 24,720 economy rooms have been lost on the coast since 1989, as a result of hotel and motel closures and upgrades. Economy rooms now make up only 5 percent of the rooms available on the coast.

Probing deeper into the economics of beach visits, the researchers calculated that the average value of a daytrip to the beach is \$37 and the cost of traveling to the beach and home again—not including the costs of parking, food, and activities—is \$22. The \$15 difference is the “surplus value” of the average daytrip. If the average trip were to cost \$15 more, many visitors might elect not to visit the beach. This explains why Californians are concerned about the cost of parking and day use fees, which exceed \$15 in many locations, as well as lodging. Researchers calculated that the average value of an overnight visit is \$605. With roundtrip travel—not including the price of an overnight stay—costing about \$194 for overnight trips, and overnight visitors staying an average of four nights on the coast, the surplus value left over for lodging is only \$103 per day. Given the difficulty of finding a place to spend the night on the coast at that price, it is easy to see why the average Californian might decide not to visit.

“If California wants to provide continued coastal access for all its citizens, we will need to focus on providing better transit options, affordable parking, and a range of lower-cost overnight accommodations,” said Philip King, a professor of economics at San Francisco State University and co-author of the study. “Addressing these barriers to access is every bit as important as managing development and sea level rise, but they have historically received less attention.”

“Over the years we have seen increasing pressure to build more higher cost accommodations, even though Coastal Act policies are intended to protect and encourage lower cost facilities,” said Coastal Commission Vice Chair Effie Turnbull-Sanders. “The commission takes this very seriously because it's getting difficult for even average families to visit our coast. We have held several workshops on the issue and are continuing to look at new and creative ways to implement these policies in order to make the coast more welcoming for everyone.”

“Our beaches and coasts belong to all Californians, regardless of income,” said Assemblywoman Lorena Gonzalez Fletcher. “This new report shows we have some work to make these public assets accessible and affordable.”

“A basic goal of the California Coastal Act is to maximize public access to the coast,” said Amy Hutzel, Deputy Executive Officer of the State Coastal Conservancy. “The state’s coastal management agencies are very interested in research that helps us understand people’s concerns so that we can focus our resources on things that will improve access for all Californians.”

“These findings are crucial because they provide quantitative data to what many communities experience, the lack of equitable access to our natural public spaces,” said José González of Latino Outdoors. “Equitable access is not the same as equal access and it's crucial that for the long-term stewardship of our public coast that all of our communities feel that our coast and beaches truly belong to all and can be enjoyed as such.”

Solving these next generation challenges to the California Coastal Act’s promise of “access for all,” the researchers conclude, will require cooperation across the public and private sectors, in addition to strong leadership from the Coastal Commission, Coastal Conservancy, and other agencies that are tasked with managing coastal land use and public access. And their report offers recommendations to policymakers for addressing these challenges.

The report is available for download [here](#) on a multimedia website that includes graphic representations of the findings, profiles of beach visitors, and interactive maps of access points and lower-cost overnight accommodations on the coast.

###