

Transit infrastructure upgrades planned for basin

By Kathryn Reed

STATELINE – Transportation planners realize not everyone wants to abandon their vehicle. Easing congestion through better driving routes, providing alternatives to passenger vehicles, and creating better connections for walkers and cyclists are the goals.

The idea is the infrastructure improvements will also make walking and cycling a more pleasant experience in the region.

Tahoe Transportation District, which has been around since 1980, is in the business of securing money for the plans various jurisdictions have and helping with the implementation. Because the basin has multiple layers of government and bureaucracy, it's the TTD's job to be the umbrella agency to get things done.



Carl Hasty looks over the map of Lake Tahoe Basin transit plans. Photo/Kathryn Reed

TTD, though it never went away, had been dormant in many ways

for many years. Carl Hasty now manages the district and Alfred Knotts is the transportation projects manager. They work for an 11-member board comprised of representatives from throughout the region, including both state transportation departments.

“We look at system needs for basin transportation,” Hasty said. “This board is focused on implementation and getting things done.”

A map in the conference room of their Stateline offices shows the five projects the TTD is working on.

One is the Loop Road on the South Shore that involves California and Nevada. For decades people have talked about diverting traffic behind the Stateline casinos to make the corridor more pedestrian friendly.

“Right now the concept is not to eliminate all traffic on Highway 50,” Hasty said. “Maybe it will be three lanes with one being for transit and bikes.”

Knotts said the environmental review is the next stage, and working with Caltrans and the Nevada Department of Transportation to development alternatives for the loop road.

With the Heavenly Village project completed in 2002 and the so-called convention center project still on the books, the idea for years has been to divert vehicle traffic so pedestrians would be more comfortable frolicking in the area.

“Stateline is where the bed base is. It is where the congestion is,” Knotts said.

Planners and developers of infrastructure are taking an approach that hasn't often been done at the lake – looking at the big picture instead of solely on an individual project-by-project basis.

As the Loop Road goes forward, those involved are aware

Edgewood Companies wants to develop a hotel on its golf course, that Horizon casino may evolve into something besides a gaming venue when the lease expires, that the Greenway Bike Trail from Meyers will empty at Stateline, that the Van Sickle Bi-State Park has broken ground under the Heavenly Gondola, and that the Stateline-to-Stateline bike trail is well on its way to being a reality.

“They all support getting around by linking places,” Hasty said. “We are looking at building a network that offers choices to get from one place to another.”

All of this is for locals as well as tourists.

The goal is have all future transportation projects be interrelated and not isolated. The car isn't going away, but the idea is people will have more choices.

The Tahoe Transportation District is also involved in the Stateline-to-Stateline bike trail. Work on the South Shore end should begin next year.

(Click [here](#) for more details.)

Another TTD project involves South Lake Tahoe and Tahoe City – water transit. The goal is connecting the North and South shores via transit. By the end of the year the federal transit analysis should be finished. Out of that will come a recommendation if water transit is viable or not.

Another project in Tahoe City is figuring out what to do with the Fanny Bridge that crosses the Truckee River. The bridge is seismically challenged and could be deemed unusable for certain weight vehicles by 2013.

“It's a lifeline bridge,” Knotts said, meaning no other crossing exists to keep commerce rolling in that area of Highway 89.

Six options have been proposed. It's possible Fanny Bridge

could become a pedestrian-bike only structure. Vehicles might be routed across the river farther up Highway 89, a bit closer to Truckee.

“It would remove a choke point and improve the flow,” Hasty said. “Then you design for the character of the place you want.”

Not having traffic in that Y intersection could make the area more walkable.

The other project in the basin the Tahoe Transportation District has a hand in is at the junction of highways 431 and 28 in Incline Village.

“It’s a scenic byway so we want to improve the aesthetics,” Knotts said.

Safety and efficiency of the Mount Rose Highway are also factors. NDOT is designing and building the project, with construction likely to begin in 2011.

A roundabout is being talked about. The plan, which is still in the works, is likely to tie into bike trails and address water quality concerns.

“I think these projects bring needed change and opportunity to the lake,” Hasty said.