

Caltrans on track with closure of Hwy. 50 in spring 2011

By Kathryn Reed

STATELINE – Caltrans is one step closer to having all the hurdles cleared so it can close Echo Summit in both directions next spring in order to replace the dilapidated rock wall.

It was a brief hearing Aug. 5 before Jim Baetge at the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency office in Stateline. With that behind them, Caltrans hopes to have the permits from TRPA on Monday. Then the internal environmental certificate can be obtained.



Sandbags will be replaced next year on Echo Summit. Photos/Kathryn Reed

The plan calls for replacing the wall that dates to 1939 with a sturdier, higher barrier that will be 32 inches off the ground. It's all in the name of public safety.

"We don't believe it will impact the scenic quality," Steven Gaytan, Caltrans transportation engineers, said after Thursday's hearing. "It will look better than the sandbags."

Some of the areas that have crumbled or been plowed into by vehicles have sandbags as a makeshift barrier.

With TRPA rules mandating no dirt be moved before May 1, Caltrans hopes to secure a waiver so construction can begin in April. This is all dependent on the weather.

No matter the exact start date, Highway 50 in to South Lake Tahoe from the west will be closed for two weeks – 24 hours a day. The next 36 days it will be reduced to one-way controlled traffic.



Highway 50
from Johnson
Pass -- a not-
so-well
maintained
county road.

If it's a less than ideal snow year, work could be done by Memorial Day. If it's like this past winter, a traffic nightmare could snarl summer travel.

Sue Barton with the Lake Tahoe Visitors Authority and Steve Teshara representing South Shore Transportation Management Association both said this is the best alternative so the work is expedited.

The thinking is May is one of the slowest months on the South Shore, so ideally businesses will not be severely impacted.

Plus, there are plenty of ways to get to South Tahoe without

crossing Echo Summit. Johnson Pass is a route locals know about. The back way by Kirkwood on Highway 88 is a scenic alternative. Coming down via the West Shore on Highway 89 is another option.