

Tahoe water transit takes hit with latest boat cutting engine

By Stephen Ward

For those who anticipated “getting on Tahoe” and sailing the shores by means of the much touted Blue Warrior water shuttle this summer, start sending out SOS signals. The water shuttle service conducted by Get On Tahoe has come to an abrupt and erratic end, with the boat being sold Friday for just enough to cover the promissory note on the vessel after being in business for a little more than two months.

The enterprise boasted a 36-foot, 20-passenger boat dubbed the M/V Blue Warrior and was owned and operated by the Tahoe Divers Conservancy, a nonprofit partner to the Alpen Group that helps fight invasive species in Lake Tahoe. The shuttle offered pick-up and drop-off services from areas such as Carnelian Bay, Sand Harbor and Thunderbird Lodge, with tickets ranging from \$35 for a round-trip adventure to \$110 for a complete Lakeshore Water Tour.



The Blue Warrior water transit ceased proving service on Aug. 13.

Photo/Provided

Conservancy spokeswoman Mechele Duhamel cited two explanations for why the shuttle was unable to wade through the turbulent waters of challenges it encountered.

“The key reason we had to sell the boat is because we couldn’t land a dock or marina to station the boat,” Duhamel said. “We had to use a dinghy to bring the passengers to the boat.”

The dinghy crippled the venture. Besides serving as a constant indicator of the lack of support from the docks and marinas, it set limitations to who could board the Blue Warrior. The company’s website deterred young children and those with limited mobility from boarding the shuttle, saying the “process of getting in and out of any dinghy can be a sporty one.”

In addition to having trouble with the marinas, Duhamel also expressed her disdain with the money allocated to the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency, a purported \$5 million, and the bi-state regulatory agency’s reluctance to provide funding for the shuttle.

According to TRPA spokesman Dennis Oliver, this is not the case.

“We don’t have a pile of money to hand to people,” Oliver said. “We are studying the feasibility of public water transport. If our studies show that waterborne transit would be a feasible venture, we would probably talk about starting a public water charter service ... but we don’t have money to fund private water shuttle companies.”

TRPA put together a water transit study in June 2007.

The notion of moving people by boat beyond scenic tours has been tried unsuccessfully a number of times on Lake Tahoe. Ridership is inconsistent, destinations are changing and

parking remains a problem.

Austin Sass, director of sales and marketing for Aramark at Lake Tahoe, believes a lot needs to be considered before rushing into this type of service. Sass runs the Tahoe Queen and M.S. Dixie II paddle-wheelers.

“One thing that needs to be looked at is parking,” Sass said. “If people are going from Heavenly Resort to Crystal Bay or Kings Beach, there needs to be a parking garage or ground shuttle that would be willing to take them to the dock. That’s a different issue in and of itself.”

Andy Chapman with the North Lake Tahoe Resort Association could not be reached for comment about how the demise of this shuttle service may impact tourists.

With ambivalence escalating and efforts dwindling, the future of waterborne transit being offered at Lake Tahoe is becoming increasingly murky.

In an Aug. 18 post on *LTN* by B Gorman, executive director of the Lake Tahoe South Shore Chamber of Commerce, she says, “I believe everyone is in agreement that we must find funds to improve bike trails, develop waterborne transit etc. etc.”

But no one has proved waterborne transit is logical or needed in Tahoe.

A March 22 *Lake Tahoe News* story says, “Another (Tahoe Transportation District) 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.”