

Camp Richardson trails on target for complete make-over

By Kathryn Reed

Pedaling around Camp Richardson could be a drastically different experience in the not so distant future.

Technically it's called the Pope Baldwin National Recreation Trail, though most people who've been on this stretch of asphalt on the South Shore know it as the Camp Rich Trail.



Cycling at Camp Rich may change in the coming years. Photos/Kathryn Reed

With nearly 110,000 trips – that would be one-way – on it each year, it is the most highly used path in the Lake Tahoe Basin, according to trail surveys by the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency.

The U.S. Forest Service, the landowners, want to improve the 30-year-old route so it meets current standards, connects to other trails in the area and is moved away from Highway 89.

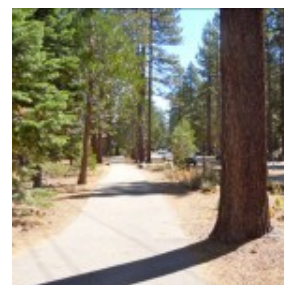
The American Association of State Highway Transportation Officials (AASHTO) defines how trails should be configured. To

meet those standards the Camp Rich route needs to be moved back five feet from the highway or a vehicle barrier installed.

Creating a two-foot shoulder of dirt or aggregate material (not paved) is another criteria. The paved trail would be 10-foot wide.

Garrett Villanueva, assistant forest engineer, said his agency is looking at the American River Trail in the Sacramento area to see if that model would work in Tahoe. The separation of user types – cyclists, walkers, equestrians – functions well on that stretch of terrain.

“We have a lot more walkers on peak days than they see on the American River path which is why it might not work,” Villanueva said. “We are going to have to figure out what works from a regulatory and user standpoint as we go through the analysis process.”



The trail doesn't meet current standards because it is so close to Highway 89.

Environmental documents for the project are expected to be out for public comment before Thanksgiving. It's possible the final documents could be completed in March and a record of decision by June. Ground breaking could be in 2012.

Because a definitive plan has not been created the cost is unknown. Villanueva said the Forest Service plans to go after Southern Nevada Public Lands Management Act dollars.

“Right now there are a lot of routes on the map. Some will fall off because of wildlife or archaeological constraints or we won’t be able to get the coverage necessary,” Villanueva said.

He envisions some of the current dirt trails going and others becoming official routes.

Improvements are expected on both sides of the highway and along the unofficial trail paralleling Fallen Leaf Lake Road. The idea with the latter is to provide safe access for campers to get to the bike trail.

Linking the end of the bike route at Spring Creek, connecting with Cathedral Road, making the dam at Fallen Leaf Lake crossable without getting off the bike, connecting with Fallen Leaf Lake Road, and possibly going to where the highway is four lanes are all on the drawing board.

Some popular cross country trails may become official routes, too.

Improving winter parking is another goal of this plan. Currently people park at the gate for Baldwin Beach to trek in, which can be dangerous and does not accommodate the number of users who want to re-create there.

While Villanueva works on the bike routes, his colleagues are working on the South Shore Recreation Plan that includes upgrades to Camp Richardson.

“To a large degree it is in the same configuration it has been for 50 years,” Villanueva said of Camp Rich. “The uses have changed. We are coordinating plans.”

As plans go forward, the public will have opportunities to

comment. When documents are released, they will be on the USFS website.