

South Shore public transit changes hands, not players

By Kathryn Reed

STATELINE – In the world of South Shore public transit, this could be one of the most monumental months on record.

On Monday, the Tahoe Transportation District board agreed to take over operation of BlueGo, the public bus system, and withdraw from the South Tahoe Area Transit Authority, which had been the overseer of the system.

STATA filed for bankruptcy this fall. At today's hearing in Reno, TTD attorney Paul Taggart expects to ask the bankruptcy judge to let his client take over the bus system and retain the rights to the handful of buses STATA owns.



Carl Hasty,
left, runs the
Oct. 18 Tahoe
Transportation
District
meeting.
Photo/Kathryn
Reed

TTD owns about three-quarters of the buses in the fleet. STATA members own the rest of the fleet. Those members are being asked to sign on to have TTD be the umbrella agency of public transit on the South Shore of Lake Tahoe.

“(Monday) was a big step ... one of a few big steps that still need to happen,” Carl Hasty, TTD manager, said after the meeting.

The board voted on a slew of actions Oct. 18 related to the takeover. For the bulk of the votes Will Garner, Placer County's rep on the TTD board, abstained.

The board's action was not a surprise. *Lake Tahoe News* first reported the change in leadership Oct. 6 after the South Lake Tahoe City Council agreed to the changes.

Even though City Councilman Bill Crawford earlier this month as reported in that story was critical of STATA, he voted for the changes Monday.

(Bruce Grego is South Lake Tahoe's rep on the TTD board. Minutes that were approved Monday indicate he was a no-show at the Aug. 31 meeting and arrived late for the Aug. 13 meeting. Normally the primary member to a board asks the alternate to attend, but Grego never did. In fact, it was City Attorney Patrick Enright who had to ask Bill Crawford to attend the Oct. 18 meeting.)

Russ Nygaard, with El Dorado County's engineering department, was in the audience at the Monday meeting at the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency office. The county had pulled its membership from STATA and taken its two buses off the street. With TTD taking over, Nygaard after the meeting said the county backs this plan.

Nygaard expects the Board of Supervisors to take up the issue this month.

This week the TTD board approved the \$4.2 million operating budget even though all the players involved have not agreed to be part of the new entity.

"I think the softest revenue source right now is Harrah's and Harveys," Hasty told his board. "We have a fair amount of work to do with them."

For the fiscal year that began Oct. 1, their combined

contribution is \$240,000.

Crawford asked what the deadline is to get the public and private partners that were part of STATA to embrace TTD. Hasty said Nov. 1. He said today's bankruptcy hearing will "have bearing on that."

Although all parties seem to agree a coordinated public transit system is needed, it has not been made clear how changing the umbrella agency will make it run smoother or be profitable. At the Nov. 12 TTD meeting, the initial draft of a five-year transit plan for the South Shore is expected to be unveiled, which could answer those question.