

Consultant recommends water transit on Lake Tahoe

By Kathryn Reed

INCLINE VILLAGE – A case was made Friday to start a pilot waterborne transit project on the North and West shores as early as next summer.

“Essentially it would be public transit on the lake,” explained Gordon Shaw of LSC Consultants. “This is not going to be a big ferry.”

He was hired by the Tahoe Transportation District to study the feasibility of such a service. On Nov. 12 he made a presentation to the board that outlined how such a system could work, the potential passenger load and projected revenues.

The board is expected to take action on a potential course of action at the December meeting.



Gordon Shaw

Shaw’s proposal anticipates the need of \$1.3 million in start-up funds, which could come partially from federal grants.

The goal would be to start with one boat that could hold up to 20 people and add a second with similar capacity the following year. They would allow for wheelchairs and bicycles. Eighteen knots would be the maximum speed. Eight decibels the highest

noise output so they could not be heard a quarter mile offshore.

Waterborne transit is not new to Lake Tahoe. Vessels plied the waters years ago to great fanfare in the first half of the last century. Attempts to resurrect this mode of transportation on a wide-scale basis has sputtered and petered out when anything did get launched.

Shaw said the key to being successful this time around is going slow and offering services that will be dependable. The boats would likely run Memorial Day to Labor Day, with weekend service after that.

Lew Madden, a retired Navy captain who lives in Carnelian Bay, spoke in favor of the boat shuttle, but raised a slew of questions that were not addressed in the consultant's presentation.

(Madden has experience with getting boats on water, which he is in the process of doing in Alaska.)

He doubts Tahoe could implement this plan until summer 2013 based on getting federal funding. He cautioned going forward without contracts in hand from landing sites. He urged TTD to join the Passenger Vessel Association to receive help, guidance and insight.

"I think it will require more work than you can imagine," Madden told the board.

Jim Markle, an Incline resident representing Sustainable Tahoe, would like the board to look at other watercraft than the five models presented. His interest lies in stability as well as the ability to land on a beach, which could open more areas to the shuttle service.

Stuart Yount, also of Incline, would like to see watercraft that could land at boat ramps and possibly a larger craft. He

said with the Incline General Improvement District changing by 40 percent, to not rule out being able to dock in Incline in the future.

Ron Treabess, interim executive director with the North Lake Tahoe Resort Association, said his agency may have money to help with something like this.

The reason to start with Placer County destinations is the number of communities in a small area. Plus, a private operator has a shuttle service on the South Shore during the summer that hits Camp Richardson, Lakeside and Timber Cove marinas.

Kings Beach is not on the list of potential landing spots because the water level is too low.

Board member Ron McIntyre brought up the idea of a temporary floating pier in Kings Beach.

With the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency's shorezone ordinance on the losing end of a recent court battle, the idea with the water transit to have nothing to do with building new piers.

Water transit is part of TRPA's Regional Plan and is a component of all community plans that it would engulf; so permitting should not be more difficult than usual. The U.S. Coast Guard would also have to sign off on the plans.

Tahoe Vista Recreation Area is interested, as is Gar Woods in Carnelian Bay.

Possible sites on the North Shore also include Tahoe City Marina, Grove Street Pier and Sunnyside Resort.

Places in Homewood Shaw has spoken to include West Shore Café, Homewood High and Dry Marina, and Obexer's Marina. Chambers Landing is out for the time being because of lack of parking.

It was noted the reduction in particulate matter from people driving less would be minimal.

“It’s close to being a wash on environmental impact,” Shaw said of the water shuttle.