

Officials pump up benefits of cycling event, Hwy. 50 closure

By Kathryn Reed

STATELINE – It was part informational session and part cheerleading rally as more than 60 people gathered to hear about what could be the convergence of the start of North America's largest road bike race and the main artery to the South Shore being closed.



A Caltrans rep and consultant from its hired public relations firm started the Thursday night meeting at Horizon hotel-casino with a brief overview of the plans to soon close Echo Summit in order to replace the dilapidated rock wall.

That was followed by an enthusiastic talk from Alison Green, marketing coordinator with Lake Tahoe Visitors Authority, about the Amgen Tour de California.

With predictions of 35,000 people being on the South Shore for the 10:30am May 15 start of the multi-day cycling event, it could be a scenic inconvenience if spectators have to come to the area some other way than Highway 50.

Deanna Shoopman, Caltrans Tahoe basin outreach coordinator, was adamant and repetitive in saying no date has been set for when the highway will be closed. When it is, though, it will be off-limits for two weeks solid, 24 hours a day. After that, it will be subject to delays for up to six weeks.

B Gorman, executive director of Lake Tahoe South Shore Chamber of Commerce, spoke of her experience of traveling between

Tahoe and the Bay Area every weekend before moving to South Lake Tahoe. She said she always found it faster during heavy traffic – like what the Highway 50 one-way traffic will be like – to go via Highway 88 by Kirkwood. Plus, she added, it's a great route on a motorcycle.

One glimmer of hope for workers who commute between the South Shore and locales on the other side of the closure is Shoopman will know by Monday afternoon if those people will be granted a permit to get through the construction area.



The rock wall at Echo Summit that will be replaced.
Photos/LTN

“We know it will not start until (at least) the first week of May,” Shoopman said of the initial two-week, 24-hour a day closure.

The good news is Heavenly Mountain Resort and Sierra-at-Tahoe will be able to stay open through Easter weekend knowing skiers and employees can get to the mountains.

Shoopman was also emphatic in stating the decision to close will be based on having a 10-day window of clear weather.

Cyclists will also be banned for the first two weeks while work is being done.

When it comes to the Tour de California, some firsts are being

set with it starting in Tahoe. This is the highest elevation start, riders make two passes through the start area, and it's the first time Nevada is part of the event. The other first is having 19 professional teams compete – the largest number in the event's six-year history.

The eight-day race ends in Thousands Oaks, headquarters of Amgen, the tour sponsor.

The Tahoe portion starts in Stateline with riders leaving near the entrance of MontBleu casino May 15. They are expected to average about 28 mph, finishing the 72-mile loop about 1pm, and then ending the first stage at Northstar-at-Tahoe. The next day the riders take off from Squaw Valley as they head south through California.

One audience member asked what happens if it snows May 15. Gorman said the race coordinators have a contingency plan they have not shared with her.



Alison Green
talks April 14
about the Tour
de California.

It's expected to be one big party along Highway 50 from Stateline to the Y. The LTVA's Green said there is talk of having deejays on opposite sides of the street competing to get the crowds excited and keep them entertained while they wait for the cyclists to ride through.

“The best thing to do that day is park somewhere and then get

out on your feet,” Green said.

The roads involved with the race will have rolling closures as the cyclists come through, which could cause delays of 30 minutes. This also means BlueGo buses will not be running their usual routes.

It will be up to private property owners – which is what the bulk of Highway 50 is except for Linear Park and the eventual Lakeview Commons site – do when it comes to allowing parking for non-customers and activities on their property.

Lauren Thomaselli, events coordinator for the city, said a map is being prepared of all the events along the cycling route on the South Shore.

A slew of events are being planned for 10 days before the pros take to the road.

The April 14 informational meeting replaced the annual tourism conference the South Shore chamber and LTVA have been putting on.

One of the things that kept being talked about was businesses should tap into the spectator demographic – ages 25-45 – because they travel with full wallets.

More information about the road closure is on this website.

Information about the cycling event is here.