

Opinion: Plan to improve South Tahoe's roads

By Tony O'Rourke

As the city sets its sights on improving the roads of South Lake Tahoe, it's a good time to reflect on the overall condition of the streets and how the Road to Tahoe ever got paved in the first place.

- The city's current roadway network is comprised of over 256 lane miles of roadway.
- Prior to 1960–1965, "rural road standards" existed throughout the community. In 1965 when the city incorporated it inherited the roadway network from the county.



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- The "typical" roadway structure on these rural roadways has been a minimal two inches of asphalt over existing compacted dirt. In most cases, no drainage infrastructure nor curb or gutter was installed. By comparison, today's standard residential roadways are 4 inches of asphalt over 8 inches of compacted Class II aggregate base material.
- Making the old roadway conditions even worse, the asphalt mixture used to create these roads included an oil-based binding material resulting in strong, but inflexible roads causing large thermal cracking throughout the network.

- In 1995, the city began investing approximately \$546,903 per year for roadway rehabilitation and overlay – for a total of \$7,109,749 expended, excluding years 2000, 2004 and 2005.
- In 2007, the city created a pavement management system to more accurately evaluate and prioritize road maintenance. Prior to the new system, windshield surveys were used to visually observe the road conditions and repairs were scheduled based on appearance. Using the new system, the city inspected every roadway and assigned a score based on the amount of pavement distress per segment. The higher the score, the better the road condition. The average score on a scale of 1 to 100 is an overall 50 or an F grade.
- The city recently evaluated the cost to convert and improve all roadways from rural conditions to “complete streets,” which includes curb, gutter, sidewalk, landscaping and lighting at cost of approximately \$300 million.
- For the first time in the city’s history, the City Council adopted a Strategic Plan and five-year financial plan which places roadway rehabilitation as a high priority and for the first time the city is allocating a substantial amount of funds to roads. The city will be expending approximately \$4 million annually or \$20 million over the next five years for roadway improvements. This figure is eight times the amount spent on any previous year in the city’s history.

The roads to Tahoe will finally begin to look and wear better than ever.

Tony O'Rourke is city manager of South Lake Tahoe.