

Tour de California in Tahoe a question mark for 2012

By Kathryn Reed

STATELINE – Will Lake Tahoe be part of the 2012 Tour de California and what do the financials from this year look like for the region?

“Don’t know” is the answer to both questions.

South Shore officials have an appointment to speak with AEG officials – owners of the race – at the end of the month about what the future holds for the area. Until all the invoices come in, the money issue is a moving target.



Next time the Tour de California is in Tahoe, everyone hopes lighter weight clothing is required.

Photo/Lisa J. Tolda

With Andrew Messick, president of AEG Sports, leaving this month to be CEO of World Triathlon Corporation, it could make the future of the tour interesting. He has been the heart and

sole behind the road bike event.

On top of that, Amgen's three-year contract to be title sponsor expired when the race finished last month. It's not known if the biotech firm will bid to retain that designation.

Carol Chaplin, Lake Tahoe Visitors Authority executive director, told *Lake Tahoe News* on June 9 the South Shore wants to be part of the multi-day bike race again, but it doesn't have to be the initial start location. Instead, being the start or end site for a stage would be more to its liking.

Jerry Bindel, a member of the LTVA board, on Thursday said hosting the end of a stage is his preference.

The board discussed the race that never was at its June 9 meeting. The South Shore was supposed to be the start location May 15, with Northstar-at-Tahoe the site where riders would end stage 1. Stage 2 was to start the next day from Squaw Valley. Instead, Mother Nature (aka snow) forced tour organizers to bypass Tahoe completely and start the race that Monday in Nevada City.

AEG officials are contemplating having the race in 2013 start in Southern California, which weather-wise could make a stop in Tahoe more appealing. Santa Rosa is the 2012 start city. Officials are also talking about having one year be all Southern California and another all Northern California.

Chaplin on Thursday told her board, "We did get a huge amount of pre-event press. We got everything we wanted out of that."

But it was the international television exposure that would ideally entice people to Lake Tahoe that was to be the big long-term financial benefit of hosting this event. That isn't likely to happen even though Tahoe received some TV coverage at the get-go.

Chaplin and Andy Chapman, tourism guru for North Lake Tahoe

Resort Association, were at the finish in Thousand Oaks – where they were on TV. But it wasn't the same as having Lake Tahoe as the backdrop for cameras.

Chaplin admitted the immediate economic boost from hosting the event fell flatter than anticipated.

Board member Jon Koster (Harrah's-Harveys), Bindel (Lakeland Village) and Pat Ronan (Lakeshore Lodge) all said they had plenty of rooms available that weekend.

"We kept hearing 30,000 people, and if they were here, I don't know where they were staying," Koster said.

Bindel said while his property didn't see a boost in room nights from the bike race, overall he sees the event as a benefit for the community.

Chaplin pointed out without hard analysis of knowing why people were in town, it's possible the room nights could have been even worse had the race not been scheduled on the South Shore.

But the board members were also in agreement the region came together in a way that is seldom seen – that a sense of pride permeated the frigid temperatures that day and for the days leading up to that Sunday.

Sue Barton, LTVA deputy executive director, said with the riders and their entourages being in town several days before the race was to start, it meant they were seeing a better side of Tahoe than on race day.

"I know some rode to Fallen Leaf Lake and some ate at Sprouts. They interacted with the locals," Barton said.

The board had praise for staff, volunteers and the community.

The weather affected the race in ways that went beyond not having the event in Tahoe. It started with airline delays from

points east of Tahoe that meant volunteers being patient while picking up dignitaries.

Volunteers willingly agreed to take a larger size T-shirt knowing they would have to wear it over their clothes to be identifiable. This meant being wet – not having a Gore-Tex outer layer on.

Riders, who had already submitted detailed menus of what they'd eat, had breakfast at 7am. After the initial delay word came in they would need to be fed again at 10am. But MontBleu and Harveys, the host hotels, weren't prepared to do that – financially or food-wise.

The tour paid for the meals. MontBleu had them go through the buffet and Harvey's put on another banquet breakfast.

This last-minute ability to juggle is part of the reason the tour has told local organizing officials they want Tahoe to be part of the tour again. Plus, the elevation gains and scenery are perfect for riders and spectators.