

# Highway 50 may be routed through neighborhoods

By Kathryn Reed

STATELINE – Turning Highway 50 near and through the casino corridor into a city street and the roads from Pioneer Trail behind Raley's at the state line into a state highway may one day be a reality.

Known locally as the Loop Road project, officials are now trying to get people to call it the Highway 50 South Shore Community Revitalization Project.



Highway 50 going east beyond Pioneer Trail near the state line could become a city street.

Photo/LTN

There was a time when the highway was to be rerouted behind all of the main Stateline casinos. Now the project only involves the mountainside of the loop road – what goes behind Harrah's and MontBleu.

The thinking is it would not be wise to keep the state highway between the lake and casinos; that's why it is not taking a

western loop.

Also originally talked about was starting the realignment at Heavenly Village Way/Park Avenue. That has been scrapped to now start at the intersection of Highway 50 and Pioneer Trail. The alignment would somewhat follow the shortcut locals take to avoid driving through the casino corridor.

This would mean turning what are now city streets into a five-lane highway – two lanes in each direction, with a middle turn lane. The casino area would be three lanes – one in each direction with a middle turn lane.

Where Lake Parkway hooks up with Highway 50 near MontBleu could become a roundabout.

### **Reasons for the change**

Highlights of the project were touched on by Carl Hasty, executive director for Tahoe Transportation District – lead agency on the project, at the Nov. 4 joint South Lake Tahoe City Council-Douglas County Commission meeting at Edgewood Tahoe.

Hasty told that group one advantage to the preferred alternative is the street in front of the casinos could more easily be closed off for special events. This would avoid nightmares like a few years ago when Highway 50 was shutdown for Opening Days Lake Tahoe.

Michael Olson, chairman of the county commission, said he likes the idea. “It would create a Tahoe experience.”

Hasty said studies show two-thirds of the highway traffic has a destination other than the casinos or Heavenly Village, so rerouting them would not take them away from their end point.

People would still be able to access the casinos as they do now – on either side of the structures.

While three alternatives are proposed (one is to do nothing), the above scenario is what transportation officials' support.

Meetings begin this week to gather input from the public. Written comments will be taken until Dec. 16. The scoping document provides more details.

All of this ties into the South Shore Vision Plan – making the area from Ski Run Boulevard to Kahle Drive more user friendly. But the Loop Road project has been talked about for decades, while the former is a new concept.

### **Eliminating people's homes**

To do what proponents want would mean displacing a number of people, along with businesses at the corner of the highway and Pioneer Trail. It's a residential community on the back roads that would become a state highway.

Hasty said when the time comes property owners would be offered fair market value.

When asked about how South Lake Tahoe's eminent domain policy plays into their thinking, he told *Lake Tahoe News*, "It could stop the project."

He also added, "Do you pay more than market value or do you not do the project?"

The City Council in 2007 passed a resolution, with an addendum added in March 2008, that essentially bans eminent domain from being used in the city limits. While there was talk of requiring the issue be taken to the voters for the policy to be overturned, that never got written into the resolution. But the council could still make it be a contingency factor for the project to go forward.

Mayor Hal Cole told *Lake Tahoe News* when Hasty made a presentation a year ago to the council, the eminent domain issue came up.

“They know how the city feels,” Cole said of project proponents.

The city resolution specifically talks about not using eminent domain to displace low- and moderate-income residents living in any type of dwelling.

Property owners have been mailed information about the project. Tenants are expected to receive a flyer this week. But that is just days from the Nov. 10 TTD board meeting – not giving people much time to rearrange their schedule if they were wanting to attend.

Relocation law demands people displaced via eminent domain be relocated. Hasty said that is the plan. Specifics have not been detailed, but Hasty said housing would be found for people in the general area. After all, many of those people have limited incomes and walk to work.

Hasty also said the project is still a long way from being a reality.

It’s estimated to cost close to \$70 million. That price tag includes acquisition and relocation expenses. TTD would like to apply for federal grants in a year if the project is shovel ready by then. That would mean having the environmental documents completed.

Besides getting the city to agree to the project, Douglas County will have to say yes. So will Caltrans and the Nevada Department of Transportation.

Hasty said the two state transportation agencies have been approached and have participated in discussions. But this is a local project, not something either state is spearheading.

**Dates to know:**

- Nov. 10 at 1pm, Tahoe Transportation District board meeting at the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency board room, 128 Market

St., Stateline.

- Dec. 7 at 9:30am, TRPA Advisory Planning Commission meeting at the TRPA board room, 128 Market St., Stateline.
- Dec. 16 is the last day to submit comments on the scoping document.