

Sawmill Road bike path weeks from breaking ground

By Kathryn Reed

If the weather cooperates, work will begin May 1 on the Sawmill Road bike trail on the South Shore.

The contract between El Dorado County and Don Garcia Excavating and Paving is signed. Permits are in hand. It's just a waiting game right now.

Besides the 8-foot-wide class 1 bike path that will be built on the south side of the road (the right side headed from Lake Tahoe Boulevard toward Meyers), parking at Sawmill Pond will be improved, a couple spaces put in near Echo View Estates, and a ton of water quality work done. Eight culverts will be replaced, channels will be lined with rock, rock bowls created to treat stormwater, the road paved and striped, and fencing put in along with some signs.

All of this comes with a price tag of \$842,000.



The dirt to the right will be a bike path on Sawmill Road by the end of summer. Photo/LTN

Much of the money comes from the Congestion for Mitigation of Air Quality funds.

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Class I – Bike Path: <i>A dedicated exclusive bike path meant for bike and pedestrian traffic.</i>					
Class II – Bike Lane: <i>A marked lane exclusively for bike travel on roadways.</i>					
Class III – Bike Route: <i>Sometimes marked, Bike Routes offer advantages compared to alternative routes. Bicycle riders must share the roadway with other vehicles.</i>					

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The Sawmill Road project is broken into two phases in large part because of funding. But right-of-way issues are a concern with the second phase, though not enough of one for planners to believe it won't be built in 2013.

The first phase will go from Lake Tahoe Boulevard to about Echo View Estates. This is all adjacent to public property owned by the California Tahoe Conservancy and California State Parks.

Phase two has more private property owners so it's taking longer to secure rights-of-way. The county cannot legally pay someone more than fair market value, no matter what the landowner believes the property is worth.

This is also why the path is being built in a non-contiguous manner. For a year the route won't tie into the network of trails that are already in the ground.

The second phase will connect with the bridge that crosses the Upper Truckee River and is the path that extends to Meyers. The design for that section is 90 percent finished. Environmental clearance is complete. When the rights-of-way issues are put to rest, permits will be sought and the Board of Supervisors will be asked to bid the project.

“We are very hopeful it will be next season. We don’t see anything stopping it,” Brendan Ferry, senior planner with El Dorado County, told *Lake Tahoe News*. “It should be a nice trail for all kinds of user groups. That was the goal.”

Changes in Meyers

As people continue out to Meyers on the existing trail they will notice changes along Highway 50 in 2013-14 when Caltrans begins water quality projects in the area.

County Supervisor Norma Santiago, last week when she addressed the Meyers Roundtable, said Caltrans expects to put a pedestrian button in at the intersection of Highway 50 and Pioneer Trail so people can cross there more safely.

This piece of news was met with applause by those at the meeting.

With how the flow of traffic is now and how the lights are set, neither cyclists nor pedestrians can safely cross at that intersection.

Caltrans also plans to create a safety section for people crossing Highway 50 right in Meyers. The wide area of asphalt near the bus station will be a landing spot of sorts as people break the crossing into segments instead of dashing across all the lanes of traffic at once.

Meyers will also have class 1 and 2 bike trails when Caltrans is done with its work.

Lake Tahoe Boulevard

Changes to Lake Tahoe Boulevard will probably come in 2014, though they could start a year earlier. These two miles of work will also likely be broken into two phases.

A class 1 trail is slated to go in on the west side of the road from Sawmill Road to Viking Way. (That’s the same side as

South Tahoe High School.)

“It will be a fully separated path kind of in the forest on an existing forest road,” Ferry said. “That is entirely on public land. We are working with the Forest Service to get that done. Permitting shouldn’t be too tough because it’s an existing disturbance.”

This will tie into the class 2 trail that comes from Y area of South Lake Tahoe.

A crosswalk will be put in so people can more safely get across Lake Tahoe Boulevard from one bike trail to the other.

Headed in the other direction, toward the Upper Truckee neighborhood, Lake Tahoe Boulevard for about four-tenths of a mile will go from two lanes in each direction to one. Part of the current pavement will be used for the bike path.

“It goes to two lanes after you get through the curve. We don’t see it as an impediment to timing,” Ferry said. “And it’s a cost effective, environmentally friendly way to get the bike path.”

Plus, the bike path there will be 6-feet-wide instead of the minimum 4-foot requirement.