

Opinion: Time to abandon Loop Road reconfiguration

Publisher's note: *The following letter was sent to the South Lake Tahoe City Council and Lake Tahoe News on July 19 in advance of the July 20 10am Tahoe Transportation District meeting at the TRPA office in Stateline.*

Dear Mayor (Claire) Fortier and Council Members:

I am writing to you to offer a few thoughts regarding how city government can further increase confidence in the community in regard to the "Loop Road" and still continue to pursue options that create a more transportation and pedestrian-friendly area in and around Heavenly Village. Those of us who oppose the existing TTD road alignment and massive destruction of private property support the City Council's existing policy opposing the TTD road alignment and the use of eminent domain.

In addition, I wanted to share with you all information contained in the city's adopted General Plan that precludes city government from allowing or approving the construction of the TTD project in its present configuration.



Dave Jinkens

The city's existing General Plan, adopted in May 2011**, contains the following language regarding relocation of Highway 50:

Existing City General Plan Transportation and Circulation Element Language

Policy TC-1.7: Highway 50 Relocation Project

“The city shall coordinate efforts with Caltrans and the Tahoe Transportation District to relocate Highway 50 to south of Heavenly Village in the Stateline Community Plan area. This will allow for reduced numbers of travel lanes on Highway 50 between Pioneer Trail and Stateline, creation of a dedicated transit lane, and enhancement of bicycle and pedestrian amenities.”

Comment on the current language

The goal of the policy has been expressed recently and publicly to create a more transportation and pedestrian-friendly area between at Heavenly Village and the proposed convention center/hotel/commercial project and to encourage use of public transportation. The existing policy does not propose a specific street alignment but speaks to the subject in general. General plan policies are intentionally general and seldom speak to a specific project in detail but rather to goals and objectives of a particular issue. The present language in the General Plan could be clarified to explain that the present General Plan policy does not contemplate massive destruction of private property and displacement of hundreds of low income and minority residents. Even if the existing language could be somehow interpreted by an overly imaginative mind to allow for the proposed specific road alignment (which it does not) it would still be inconsistent with other parts of the city's General Plan as noted below. Clarifying the existing General Plan Transportation and Circulation Element language would help to avoid misunderstanding and promote public confidence in city government policies.

Proposed new language to clarify the city's General Plan

Transportation and Circulation Element:

“The city shall coordinate efforts with Caltrans and the Tahoe Transportation District (as may be needed) to develop programs and improvements that create a more transit and pedestrian-friendly venue in and around the existing Heavenly Village and proposed conference center/hotel/commercial area. Proposals for rerouting of traffic and creating pedestrian bridge linkages should be evaluated and examined in this regard. Any proposed actions or projects in this area must be consistent with the City’s adopted Housing Element and be financially feasible.”

As you know, the city’s General Plan may be amended by the City Council by resolution or by initiative of the electors of the city.

Existing TTD Loop Road alignment is inconsistent with the city’s adopted General Plan.

In addition to the numerous and substantive reasons why the proposed alignment of the Loop Road is bad public policy, the City Council and the Tahoe Transportation District need to consider the following. The proposed TTD Specific Loop Road alignment is inconsistent with the City’s General Plan Housing Element. It discourages and destroys affordable and workforce housing in the area and diminishes the supply of such housing. The City Council and Planning Commission cannot make a finding of consistency of the proposed TTD Loop Road alignment with the city’s General Plan (that it is required to do under state law) for the construction of such a project because it violates at a minimum the following adopted policies in the City’s Housing Element (HE).

HE-1

To provide housing opportunities for South Lake Tahoe residents of all economic level

HE- 2

To encourage construction and maintenance of affordable and/or workforce housing in South Lake Tahoe.

HE-3

To preserve and enhance the existing supply of housing.

HE-5

To provide decent housing and quality living environment for all South Lake Tahoe residents regardless of age, race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, marital status, ancestry, national origin, disability, or economic level.

HE-7

To provide for a variety of housing types, sizes, price ranges, and densities compatible with the existing character and integrity of residential neighborhoods.”

Conclusion

All of us in opposition to the TTD Loop Road alignment want to be in a position to support measures that promote the use of public transportation, pedestrian facilities and bicycle use in the area in and around Heavenly Village. We look forward to working with all parties to achieve these objectives when evaluating possible new road and/or pedestrian bridge and bicycle route options.

Sincerely,

Dave Jinkens, South Lake Tahoe