

Highway 28 plan – safe road for drivers, recreationists

By Anne Knowles

CARSON CITY – A dozen Nevada and federal agencies are developing a plan they say will make the East Shore of Lake Tahoe a safer and more accessible recreational destination for motorists, cyclists and pedestrians alike.

The plan covers about 13 miles of Highway 28, from Incline Village to Spooner Lake, and is an update to the 2000 corridor management plan for the area.

A 2- to 3-mile stretch from Crystal Bay already is being undertaken locally by Washoe County and will include a separated bikeway, new signage, traffic calming and enhanced line of site at intersections.



Improvements are already happening on Highway 28, like the roundabout put in this season at the base of Mount Rose Highway.

Photo/LTN

The agencies are relying on local efforts like the Crystal Bay plan and other studies, and then working to fill in the gaps, according to Derek Kirkland, capital program specialist with the Tahoe Transportation District in Stateline, one of the

participating agencies.

“One of the thoughts being considered in the plan is to relocate the unsafe shoulder parking to various off-highway locations within the corridor and provide more convenient access to popular recreational destinations,” Kirkland said, “and create multi-modal connections through shared use paths separated from the highway as well as transit service for the entire corridor.”

The Highway 28 plan could end up including transportation service from as far away as Reno as well as new parking lots, hiking and biking trails and road improvements such as new signage and guard rails to boost safety, improve lake clarity and attract new visitors.

The agencies are seeking public comment on the project during four public meetings. Three meetings – in south Reno, at UNR and in Carson City – were this past week and the final meeting, at The Chateau in Incline Village, is scheduled Oct. 9 from 5-7:30pm.

Three of the four meetings were outside the basin because the majority of the visitors to the corridor are from Reno, as well as Carson City and Carson Valley, Kirkland said.

There is also a website to post suggestions and ideas through Oct. 29. At the website, people can type comments on virtual sticky notes and attach the notes anywhere on a map of the area. Visitors can also read and “like” comments left by others.

The effort started last year with the launch of the East Shore Express bus service between Incline Village and Sand Harbor State Park, which was designed to reduce car traffic and parking along the highway during the busy summer season.

The service, which had 12,000 rides between June 15 and Sept. 3, resulted in about 162 fewer cars parked along the shoulder

of Highway 28 on peak summer days, according to the TTD, which used LSC Transportation Consultants to count cars during busy days in August.

Kirkland said the goal is to extend the bus service to Spooner Lake. To fund that, service on Monday and Tuesday may be reduced in the future to free up the limited money. Currently, two buses run every 20 minutes from 9am to 6pm between Incline Village and Sand Harbor during the summer. The service is funded by grants from the U.S. Forest Service and the Nevada Department of Transportation as well as fares, which are \$3 for adults and \$1.50 for children.

Bike trails from Lake Shore Boulevard to Sand Harbor are also being studied and will soon undergo environmental review with construction slated for 2014. Loomis Engineering in Carson City is designing the trail and a draft document for public comment should be available this winter or spring, said Nanette Hansel, senior environmental planner with Ascent Environmental in Stateline.

The trail, designated for now as the North Demonstration Project, would be part of the Stateline-to-Stateline bike trail. The first mile of the South Demonstration Project, from Kahle Drive to Elks Point Road, is expected to be completed this month and the next portion, from Elks Point to Round Hills Pine Beach, will begin next summer.

Kirkland said they are also talking to the Mt. Rose ski resort about using its parking lot in the summer and providing transportation from there to the corridor.

“Students (at UNR) want a bus from Reno to the lake,” he said.

For the future, the agencies are considering adding parking lots along the Highway 28 route to reduce shoulder parking, adding trailheads to make it easier to access beaches, more bike trails, and signage and guard rails both for safety and aesthetics.

“One option is getting rid of all shoulder parking with new parking lots,” Kirkland said. “Not taking away parking but relocating it.”

Shoulder parking, said Kirkland, contributes to road erosion and poses dangers to drivers, bike riders and walkers alike.

But it will be close to impossible to find land to build parking lots, said North Swanson, a resident of Cave Rock who attended the Carson City public meeting on Oct. 4.

“It’s steeper than heck on both sides,” said Swanson. “Frankly, our concern is they will take away our parking. We’ve fought the battle for parking for 25 years.”

Swanson is a coordinator for Tahoe Area Naturists and appealed a USFS plan to enlarge its lots that he said would have reduced parking from 500 spots on the highway shoulder to 50 parking lot spaces.

Shelly Aldean, a Carson City supervisor who also attended the meeting, said she was in favor of plans that cut down on car traffic and its ill environmental effect.

“Anything that reduces congestion, idling time and removes people from the shoulders,” Aldean said. “We need a multifaceted approach.”

This Highway 28 diagram outlines some of the plans.