

Loop road financial study focuses on one route

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By Kathryn Reed

If Highway 50 were to go behind Harrah's Lake Tahoe and MontBleu casinos, would this be a good financial decision?

Yes, according to the study done by Economic & Planning Systems Inc., a Sacramento-based land economics-consulting firm hired by the Tahoe Transportation District.

The report says retail sales could increase by \$16 million to \$25 million per year if the loop road were built. What year that would happen is not known.

"A complete street has much slower traffic and is easier to cross, so when people shop they want to cross back and forth. It slows the rate of traffic," David Zehnder, managing principal of the consulting firm, told *Lake Tahoe News*. "And with a more friendly streetscape you provide a new dynamic that is more favorable in attracting spending."



A delivery truck needs all five lanes of Highway 50 to get to Embassy Suites South Lake Tahoe. Photo/Kathryn

Reed

The loop road project spearheaded by the Tahoe Transportation District, a sister agency of the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency, proposes turning Highway 50 from about the eastern end of Pioneer Trail in South Lake Tahoe into a city street until Lake Parkway in Stateline. The highway would go around the casinos on the mountain side.

Would another realignment of the highway provide greater financial reward for the area? Would sprucing up the area without a highway realignment bring added revenues?

Those answers are unknown.

The consultants, who were paid \$39,963, only studied one version. (The taxpayer dollars came from the Federal Highway Administration and Southern Nevada Public Lands Management Act.)

Also unknown is what happens to businesses along the current highway that have delivery trucks that don't have another way to access the property if the road were narrowed.

"We are looking at various options for deliveries, however, have not made any decisions as of today," Bill Cottrill with Embassy Suites told *Lake Tahoe News*.

The financial study was done despite the fact that no preferred alternative has been picked, though the forces driving the proposal want the mountain-only alternative; and that the environmental study has not begun; and that the city of South Lake Tahoe has yet to host its workshop. (That is set for March 12, 6pm, Lake Tahoe Airport.)

Even though the full report has not been released, the executive summary of the financial analysis is out. It says, "It should be noted that this economic analysis has not been scoped to address the potential relocation of any specific

businesses that may be required to accommodate the right-of-way for the roadway realignment. It should also be noted that, although other potential alignments have been evaluated as part of current and past planning efforts, this analysis is predicated on a 'mountain-side' alternative under which the roadway realignment generally occurs along the southern portion of the existing commercial district behind the existing Village Shopping Center along Montreal Avenue/Lake Parkway."

Officials say the full document could be released any day. But it's not known if it will be out by Friday when the business coalition put together to analyze the study meets for the first time. (The meeting is March 1, 11:30am. Here is the finance meeting agenda, which includes the executive summary. Future meetings of this group are tentatively set for March 6 and March 20.)

South Lake Tahoe City Manager Nancy Kerry would not comment until she has read the full report.

Douglas County Manager Steve Mokrohisky told *Lake Tahoe News*, "A revitalized downtown in the South Shore is critical to creating a vibrant and accessible community for local residents and visitors, as well as reversing the environmental and economic decline in the Tahoe basin. The study is an important step in identifying the need for and quantifying the impact of revitalizing our downtown area through use of the complete streets model, including \$16 million-\$25 million in increased retail sales annually. The challenge in front of all of us that care about the future of the community, environment and economy in the South Shore is to pursue reasonable solutions that move us forward."

Zehnder claims people will stop at the Heavenly Village and Village Center more often because a reduced speed limit will get them to notice the area and signage in the back will let those going by know what's in the buildings.

What isn't known, because the study isn't out, is if it addresses the financial impact to the properties that aren't developed and how the casinos may be impacted. It's possible the vacant lots zoned commercial would become more valuable if the highway were to go in front of those locations.

Caesars Entertainment, parent company of Harrah's and Harveys, owns the parcel behind Harrah's up to Lake Parkway. A lot listed as undevelopable is owned by the casino giant on the south side of Lake Parkway in Stateline.

Edgewood Companies owns a large swath of vacant land that abuts Van Sickle Bi-State Park, goes behind MontBleu and links up with Lake Parkway at Highway 50.

Randy Lane, who created the hole on the north side of Highway 50 on the California side of the state line, owns a parcel on Montreal Road before it becomes Lake Parkway, between Fern Road and Heavenly Village Way. He owns another plot adjacent to that one just going up the mountain. He also owns vacant commercial land adjacent to Van Sickle Bi-State Park at the end of Heavenly Village Way. (This would be to the right of the park if facing the entrance.)

A company called Tahoe I Nv Lic, with a post office box in Carson City, bought commercial acreage from Falcon Capital, the company run by Lane, which is on Lake Parkway in California at the state line.