

# Letter: Loop road will help South Lake Tahoe

**Publisher's note:** *The author of this letter first sent this to the South Lake Tahoe City Council and he asked for it to be reprinted here.*

**Dear Council Members,**

Unfortunately I am not able to attend the Special Council Meeting on March 12, 2013, at 6pm, but I would graciously request that you read this letter during the discussion and make it publicly available.

As the owner of Basecamp Hotel, South Lake Tahoe, I am a small business owner in the community and wish to make a public comment regarding the Highway 50 Re-alignment project.

I believe we are all in agreement that the current situation of high unemployment, a blighted tourist core area, and an economy in decline is not acceptable as a vision for our community. It is clear that we need to re-invent our core to keep South Lake Tahoe as a major tourist destination while maintaining and creating jobs and opportunities for our residents who depend on our main industry for their livelihoods. A vibrant, walk-able core is vital to create an inviting environment for the visitors, reduce car trips and abate pollution that is contributing to the long-term decline in clarity of our most important asset; our lake.

Our biggest asset is our natural environment from the mountains to the lake, so the current situation of a four-lane highway dividing the mountains from the lake in our core tourist area with dangerous traffic, noise and pollution is not an environment that is attractive to visitors who come to Tahoe to experience nature and get away from their car. Other mountain destinations from Aspen to Whistler have been

stealing away our visitors with their superior, walkable environment. In fact, I would challenge you to find another successful outdoor-focused mountain resort that has a four lane highway separating its bed base from its main attractions, shops and restaurants.

Change is always tough, and whenever cities are required to make bold decisions, there are always people who will be affected, as well as people who are resistant to change in any form.

Bold changes however are necessary to transform the future of any community, which is why we should not shy away from change here in South Lake Tahoe.

Imagine San Francisco's Embarcadero if they still had a double-decker freeway running along the waterfront. The bold decision by the Board of Supervisors to remove eight-lanes of highway, against the will of a very vocal opposition, was not initially popular, but ended up transforming the waterfront in San Francisco from a wasteland of blight, high crime and drugs into the most vibrant part of the city, a haven for runners, hikers, bikers, restaurant goers and shoppers.

Unquestionably the decision to remove the freeway in 1982 is the main reason why San Francisco is able to host the America's Cup in 2013.

While we are not San Francisco, nor do we want to be, the Embarcadero is an example of what can be achieved when leaders have an open mind and make the types of bold decisions that are necessary to map out a vision for the future of their city, our city.

As a City Council I believe that it is your job not only to listen to the various voices in the community, but also to create a vision and sell the community on the full potential of our city. Great leadership is not about trying to please everybody, it's about doing what is right for your city, even

if it means that you'll upset some constituents for the greater good of the city. As civic leaders you will be acutely aware that there is no decision that doesn't have some vocal opposition.

As a business owner on the "wrong (lake and project 3) side of the tracks (highway)", I send my guests to go eat, shop and play at the wonderful businesses within walking distance (and as such within walking distance of 5,700 hotel rooms in my immediate vicinity) such as Basecamp Pizza (no relation), Driftwood Café, Lucky Beaver or Naked Fish Sushi that are in our tourist core. When it comes to asking whether they can walk, my inclination is to say yes, but I frequently have guests who come back saying that they were not comfortable crossing a poorly lit highway, especially at night and with their children, can you blame them? The next time they go out they take their car and drive despite being within walking distance, hardly a good solution for a destination that prides itself on its natural environment. I'm sure my colleagues on the mountain side of the freeway have the same issue when sending people to go see the wonderful lake.

I have read the Economic and Planning Systems Inc. report date March 1, 2013, entitled "Economic Analysis of the US50/South Shore Community Revitalization Project," and I find it to be a compelling argument for the need to create a "compelling main street." While it is clear that there is still much work to do to find the best alternative, I would urge the City Council to:

1. Continue on the path of exploring alternatives that would re-align a four-lane highway away from our tourist core.
2. Create a better non-motorized connection from the mountains to the lake.
3. Create a walkable tourist core with vibrant retail and entertainment that encourages guests to leave their cars

parked and use alternative methods of transport to explore the area.

4. Make bold decisions for the future of South Lake Tahoe in five, 25, and 50 years, without being overly focused on 2013-2018 when there will be inevitable disruption and discontent.

5. Fairly compensate those who will be directly and adversely affected by whatever plan is chosen without being held hostage by the vocal minority.

I wish I could have been at the meeting to voice my points in person, but I hope that you find the time to read my letter and perhaps take in some of my thoughts. Now is not the time to stick our heads in the sand, now is the time to map a vibrant future for South Lake Tahoe, and the evaluation of re-alignment alternatives is a great first step.

Respectfully yours,

**Christian Strobel, founder Basecamp Hotels**