

Letter: Say 'yes' to the loop road

Publisher's note: This letter was originally sent to South Lake Tahoe's elected officials and the author asked for it to be published in Lake Tahoe News. It is partially original content, part form letter that Weidinger Public Relations sent via Tahoe Transportation District to proponentsd of the loop roa.

To the community,

As a resident and member of a management team at a local nonprofit in South Lake Tahoe, I urge you to consider all the facts about the loop road project before making any decision at the March 12 South Lake Tahoe City Council special meeting. I hope you hear the multitude of community members in support of the loop road and don't let a few, loud voices with personal, vested interests overshadow the many real, positive benefits this project would provide our community.



Erica Eng

You have already started to make positive changes with Lakeview Commons, improving sidewalks and bike paths, continued development of the tourism Stateline corridor, Van Sickle Park, and community planning meetings. Let's build on this momentum and shape an identity for our city that we can all be proud of!

We are at a critical juncture in our city's evolution and potential. The state and nation's economy are starting to rebound and domestic leisure travel is projected to increase by 1.6 percent with a corresponding increase in leisure travel spending of 4.5 percent (as quoted in your January 2011 Strategic Planning document).

Now, more than ever, is the time to make broad changes to revitalize and change our cities' appearance, so South Lake Tahoe can truly become a destination city. Your personal responsibility for the fate of our city and your critical decision on this project will directly shape whether South Lake Tahoe continues its status quo of a declining economy, shrinking population, and old infrastructure, or whether we decide to be proactive and take meaningful steps to make our city more attractive, accommodating, and forward-moving for U.S. and international tourists and the residents that love this special place.

I encourage you to consider the specific consequences the loop road project will have on our city and community. Please review all the benefits that the realignment of Highway 50 and the development of a local main street could bring including:

- A recent study indicated the potential for increased retail sales could be up to \$25 million annually.
- Increase in revenue would benefit California and Nevada.
- Tourism and visitor-services are the largest economic drivers for South Shore and account for more than half of total jobs in the Lake Tahoe Basin.
- The town needs a face lift – the current appearance is a road that stretches along segmented communities accented by casinos, lake and mountain-side property, motels with vacancies, strip mall-type commercial areas with vacant stores and poorly designed, unsafe parking lots. The current look is from the '70s while other tourist areas re-invest and advance

their destination.

- Redirecting traffic behind the casino core opens room for other possibilities: increasing sidewalks from 5 feet to 11 feet, allowing for street-side dining, landscaping and benches. This will create more of a quaint city feel and a defined, fluid business and residential strip that is also more accessible by walking and biking. Improving the lay-out will naturally encourage people to slowly and easily move between different parts of the town, so visitors stay at stores for longer, visit more locations, spend more money, and enjoy the surrounding environment.
- Making positive improvements would be a catalyst to entice other investors who will want to capitalize on the growing potential for an increase in customers and revenue. The new Basecamp Hotel is a good small-scale example of this with its recent media attention from Time, New York Times, Travel and Leisure to name a few, and top-businesses like Google selecting it as a destination for a management retreat.
- It will address safety and traffic flow issues (i.e., wider sidewalks and biking areas to increase safety for pedestrians, drivers and cyclists, more lighting, slower traffic, less traffic and congestion on Highway 50, etc.).
- Residents being relocated will get assistance and access to better housing.
- A built environment that reflects and enhances the natural environment.
- Improved air quality, upgraded BMPs, and a reduction in “village” noise through realignment of traffic flow.
- Improvements consistent with the city’s General Plan.

You have heard inaccurate claims from the project’s opponents that say it will result in a loss of business and the project

is an eminent domain issue. Realistically, both business and residents will see improvements by being located in a newly revitalized downtown where shopping, restaurants, residences and recreation areas connect to each other and are more accessible by walking, biking or using the local road. It will provide upgraded housing for affected, nearby residents and safer neighborhoods by redirecting pass-through traffic traveling at high speeds. It will finally provide the city with a cohesive identity where both tourists and residents have an attractive, central area to gather together.

I hope you seriously consider your responsibility as an elected official to make a decision that advances and benefits the larger community, and does not serve to benefit a few select interests, prior to voting on the South Shore Revitalization Project/Loop Road. Your decision will directly impact the perception and marketability of our city, the number of tourists who will visit and spend money, the growth of existing and new business, and a connected, cohesive city layout that further encourages more tourism and residents. Ultimately, your decision has the potential to make South Lake Tahoe a top destination and place to live, or a fragmented, crumbling blight with increasing social and economic problems. I believe a brighter future for South Lake Tahoe is a reality, and I hope you do as well. Please do your part so together we can take positive, intentional steps toward a brighter future for the community that we love.

Thank you for your consideration and your dedication and service to our city.

Sincerely,

Erica Eng, South Lake Tahoe