

South Lake Tahoe council wants environmental study of loop road

By Kathryn Reed

Will a loop road beyond what exists today ever be built is a question to be answered on another day. What the South Lake Tahoe City Council on Tuesday night decided is that the environmental process needs to move forward.

After four hours of input from the community, the project engineer, the financial consultant and the council, the vote was 4-1, with Councilwoman Angela Swanson the dissenter, to take it to the next level. The motion was to recommend to the Tahoe Transportation District board members that at their April meeting when they are expected to vote on what to include in the EIR-EIS that they include the following alternatives: the two triangle proposals, no action, and a fourth to be determined by the TTD board that is not the proposal that they first talked about. Transit is also to be incorporated into one of the alternatives.

Swanson wanted the TTD suggestions to be studied plus the 2004 alternative A to provide more variety.



Loop road project manager

Mark Rayback talks March 12 to the South Lake Tahoe City Council. Photo/Kathryn Reed

She is the city's rep on the TTD board. Swanson assured everyone she would vote the conscious of the council at the TTD meeting.

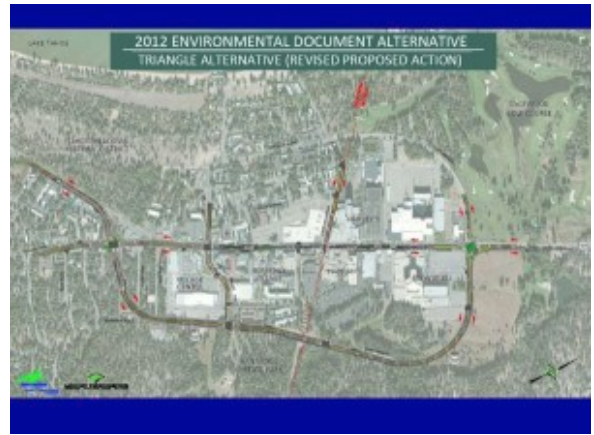
While the council recognizes the need for change, they aren't convinced the loop road is the change that is needed. But they also don't believe now is the time to stop progress.

They worry about how businesses that are barely hanging on will be able to endure three-plus years of construction, how deliveries will be made to existing businesses if the front and back of centers change, if people will bypass Heavenly Village if the highway no longer takes them directly in front of it, and if this is the best idea for the city.

Mayor Tom Davis is tired of consultants saying X number of dollars will come to town if the council builds something and then the city winds up in debt over unrealized promises.

For more than 30 years people have talked about having Highway 50 go behind all the Stateline casinos or on one side and making the current highway a city street that would be narrowed, have a reduced speed limit and be able to be closed off for events.

(The TTD presentation will be on the city's website. It includes historical alignments that have been studied, the ones TTD staff favors, along with information about the economic study that was done.)



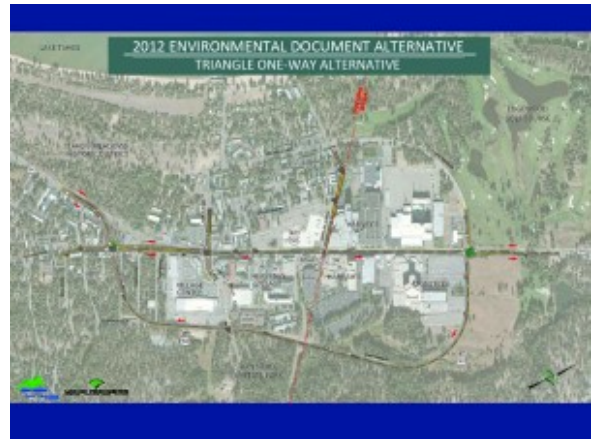
The proposed preferred alternative by Tahoe Transportation District staff.

It's estimated it could take up to two years for the final environmental documents to be done. Through that process there will be more opportunities for public input.

Of the 23 people who spoke March 12, 11 were in favor of a loop road, eight against the project and four took no distinct position. In the latter category is Tahoe Crescent Partners, owners of the Village Center.

Mark Rayback, project engineer with Wood Rogers, said it's possible an all-season bridge could be built to cross over Highway 50, if it goes on the mountain side, to take people to Van Sickle Bi-State Park.

It's possible Stateline Avenue could be three lanes by using the right-of-way that exists. This way during special events the traffic could be two lanes in the direction with the most vehicles.



The second triangle proposed route.

Vision. That is the word that was used the most.

Many speakers embraced wikeable, a word coined by City Manager Nancy Kerry at last week's economic forum. It's walkable and bikeable all at the same time. That is one vision.

Complete streets. This would bring sidewalks, lighting and landscaping.

Community. It would better erase the state line, thus tying the South Shore together, with the goal of creating a place for locals that tourists want to visit.

Environment. It would reduce traffic congestion, increase air quality, retain the same number of streets (so nothing more is being paved, it would just be repurposed).

A big vision goes beyond talking about the highway, but looking at four to five blocks deep at what the "tourist district" could evolve into.

Having signs telling people where things are, allowing easy crossing of the roads, transit that is reliable and better access to the lake are all components of the vision.

