

5 loop road alternatives to be studied

By Kathryn Reed

STATELINE – With a near unanimous vote, the Tahoe Transportation District on Friday selected five loop road alternatives to study in the environmental documents. But what that assessment will look like is not expected to be released in draft form until January 2015.

Angela Swanson, South Lake Tahoe's rep to the TTD board, voted the council's preference April 12 when she was the lone dissenter. While she expressed the city's desire for a loop road and to work with the partners to make it happen, she said because the majority of the council takes issue with one of the alternatives, she had to vote no.

Fellow TTD board member and Douglas County rep Nancy McDermid gave her a bit of schooling in policy and procedure; saying how it's normal to not like all alternatives in any document, but that this is the democratic practice and it's how prejudices get ironed out.



This triangle alternative is the preferred route for the loop road on the South Shore.

But McDermid doesn't attend South Tahoe council meetings to know that this board wants to act united and not fractionalized. It also has no problems telling other entities how to do their job.

The Tahoe Transportation District – not the city, not Caltrans, not NDOT – drives the loop road.

This summer fieldwork will be done to help gather information that will be used for the environmental analysis. Then in 2014 the analysis will be done, with a draft coming out in early 2015.

The contentious alternative for the city is what is now called Alternative 2 with options. It would still take out the buildings to the west of the intersection of Highway 50 and Pioneer Trail near the state line.

The triangle alternative is deemed the preferred alternative. It would start about 500 feet west of that intersection at the two vacant lots on the highway that the city owns. Fewer businesses are likely to be demolished with this scenario.

Both of these alternatives require right-of-way acquisitions and displacement of businesses and residents.

The differences and impacts will be part of the environmental analysis, which looks at the environmental, social and economic effects of each alternative.

Both of these routes have Highway 50 going behind the Village Center, Harrah's and MontBleu, with a two-lane roundabout at the intersection where it connects with present-day Highway 50 on the eastern side in Stateline.

In the analysis consultants will look at how narrow the current highway through the casino corridor could be, how wide sidewalks could be, and what median landscaping would work. That road would then be a city street – maintained by South

Lake Tahoe and Douglas County where applicable.

The goal of the loop road is to create a complete street design to replace today's highway, move the highway out of what proponents want to become a more pedestrian friendly area, create an area where events could be staged, and have an aesthetically pleasing area for locals and tourists.

McDermid said she would like planners to look at the possibility of separating cyclists from motorists as is done in many parts of the world, but is not common in the United States. This would mean a lane of car traffic, then a curb, then a bike lane, then another curb with sidewalk, and the businesses.

The other alternatives include a skyway that would be an elevated area near the casinos. This was included to show a route with less right-of-way needed to be secured.

McDermid asked about clearing snow and where the run-off would go. The concept was not taken seriously by the consultant or those in the room, as laughter accompanied any talk of this suggestion. Still, though, what the board voted on was that the alternatives were worth studying and represented diversity and input from the public via a series of meetings.

Another alternative is the one-way triangle that has traffic going in a circle, but creates more state highway coverage and does not create much of a streetscape.

As is customary, a do nothing alternative is included.

Having the loop road go on the lake side is not being considered, nor was it part of the economic analysis.

A business group was convened to study that economic report. It was originally tasked with providing peer review, but that did not happen. Instead, the outcome was the parroting of the project's goals – create a more walkable, bikeable community,

where people want to linger, spend money and events can be put on.

Going forward a citizens' committee will be created with the preliminary desire to get input from people not just in the state line area. This is because whatever does or does not happen with the loop road will impact everyone who lives on the South Shore in terms of driving through the area, shopping, dining, increased-decreased tax dollars, construction delays, and the overall future of that section of the community.