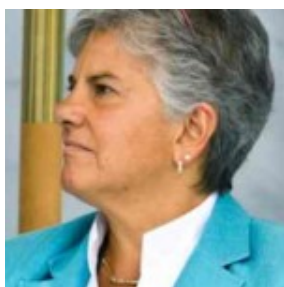


Opinion: Steering toward more Tahoe bike paths

By Joanne Marchetta

A dream of the future has a way of inspiring people to achieve seemingly impossible feats. The goal is emblazoned in the imagination and obstacles are swept aside by an unwavering vision. A marquis objective in the effort to make our communities more walkable and bikeable is a dream many people in the Lake Tahoe Basin have been working toward for decades – a single, connected bikeway encircling the entire lake.

By working together we have seen more and more pieces of this dream take shape. Since 2011, nearly 30 miles of bike trails, bike lanes, bike routes and sidewalks have been constructed. Key stretches remain to be completed and while many projects are in the works, finalizing this dream will take the steadfast determination and imagination of each of us.



Joanne
Marchetta

The massive undertaking of the Stateline-to-Stateline Bikeway along Lake Tahoe's East Shore is a prime example. Eventually, this bikeway will span 30 miles and connect Stateline to Crystal Bay. A north demonstration project is expected to begin construction in 2015 to connect Incline Village to Sand Harbor State Park. This section alone could see more than 2,000 one-way cyclist trips on a peak summer day.

A two-mile south demonstration project from Kahle Drive in Stateline to Round Hill Pines Beach is already complete. But between the two are many miles of terrain, stream and road crossings, and a patchwork of land ownership.

There is no doubt that completing a bikeway around Lake Tahoe can be done. It will take strong public support and a collective willingness to overcome the constant challenges of funding, sometimes slow progress, and seemingly insurmountable obstacles.

Are we up to the challenge? Do you share in the dream? You don't have to ride daily to understand the economics of cycling for an area like ours. Basinwide, cyclists today contribute an average of \$14.1 million annually to the area's economy. We are not the only ones to realize this. Completing a connected bikeway around the lake and improving safety for bicyclists and pedestrians on our roads and highways will give us a competitive edge and provide a world-class, environmentally-friendly recreation amenity that could be as important as our ski areas.

What residents can do

Public officials need to hear from you. Great ideas are not automatically a priority. I encourage you to visit your commission or council regularly, as well as the boards of the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency and Tahoe Transportation District, to voice your support. With more than 70 percent of the land in the basin in federal ownership, letting your representatives know the importance of this effort is also essential.

We also need to be creative in the arena of funding. The town of Truckee recently passed a quarter-cent sales tax measure to support bike facilities. In Placer County, some transient occupancy tax, or TOT, is used to build and maintain trails. Solutions cannot solely be sought through public funding,

however. The donor-supported Tahoe Fund is a creative source of private funding that is becoming essential to Lake Tahoe environmental projects.

You can also take part in the Tahoe Bike Challenge. Right now the annual event is in its second week of activity and the results are impressive. Last year, participants logged 18,800 miles of bicycle commuting which kept more than 35,000 pounds of carbon dioxide out of the basin's air. Behind the statistics of the Tahoe Bike Challenge is a message to TRPA and our partner agencies in the basin: we owe it to you to continue delivering more bike trails, bike lanes and safe routes to walk. Keep sending that message.

Maintain the momentum

Fortunately, this dream is not starting from scratch. Strong partnerships have been delivering pieces of this bikeway for years and progress is still going strong. Other than the Stateline-to-Stateline projects in Nevada, this year and next more sections along the West Shore will be complete. The Meeks Bay Bike Path will link Sugar Pine Point State Park and Meeks Bay Resort; and a separated shared-use path is being constructed in Homewood to finally close a long-standing gap.

On the South Shore, Caltrans and South Lake Tahoe are continuing work through the heart of town installing new sidewalks, bike lanes, bus shelters, lighting, and water quality improvements. Also, the existing separated path network in South Lake Tahoe, much of it more than 20 years old, is undergoing complete rehabilitation.

All of this momentum is progress. Let's keep the dream alive.

Joanne Marchetta is executive director of the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency.