

Movement under way for free transit in Tahoe

By Kathryn Reed

Free transit. Regional transit. Transit that goes where people want to go.

These are concepts that many tourist destinations have embraced for years. Lake Tahoe, not so much.

But that could change. Tahoe Transportation District in 2015 plans to make a concerted effort to take the necessary steps to bring free regional transit to the Lake Tahoe Basin.

“If each community in the region is interested in being a competitive resort community, we have to go there (with free transit),” Carl Hasty, executive director of Tahoe Transportation District, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Hasty was at the Dec. 9 South Lake Tahoe City Council meeting giving the electeds an update on transit issues, including the loop road near the state line.

He started out by saying there is a strong correlation between a strong economy and modern infrastructure. Tahoe is lacking that infrastructure and the economy proves his point.

In looking at places like Vail, Whistler and Park City that offer free transit, the funding comes from federal, state and local government entities.

“We need to create funding sources that don’t currently exist,” Hasty told the council.

Hasty did not have a dollar figure for what free transit would cost or what the city’s share would be. But he is simultaneously working with the North Shore to try to tie the

bus services together.

“On free transportation, I’d like a comprehensive network,” Councilman Austin Sass said. He wants it to include biking and hiking trailheads. “I would like it to go from Spooner Summit to Echo Summit.”

Sass also wants to make sure officials from El Dorado and Douglas counties are part of the dialog.

Hasty said a free, expanded bus service would benefit locals and tourists. For tourists, he told *LTN*, it provides a fluid experience, where they don’t have to worry about how to get from point A to point B.

Plus, he added, when a bus service is safe and convenient, it adds to the overall experience.

When TTD has offered free service on BlueGo on the South Shore the ridership tends to double – with more locals and visitors on board. But those opportunities are infrequent and are based on the ability to get outside funding to cover the costs.

Vail Resorts pays TTD to provide free bus service to Heavenly Mountain Resort on certain routes – mainly the ones servicing lodging properties.

Hasty said in 2015 TTD will be actively seeking community input about what it wants in public transit throughout the Lake Tahoe Basin.