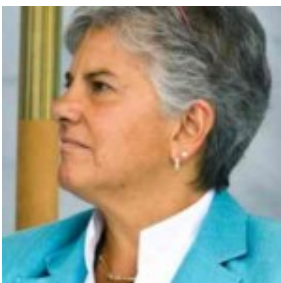


Opinion: Transportation an environmental driver

By Joanne Marchetta

There's a lot to be learned by studying the success of others. At the Tahoe Talks Brown Bag Lunch this month, a design engineer for the Federal Highway Administration discussed how modern roundabouts are being used to improve traffic and make roads safer for drivers, bicyclists, and pedestrians, as well as where they would make the most sense at Lake Tahoe.

Tahoe Regional Planning Agency and its partners started the monthly discussion series to better engage people and get all of us thinking about critical issues such as transportation and how we can work together for solutions to our biggest challenges.



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Transportation plays a central and transformative role in restoring Lake Tahoe's environment, revitalizing our local communities, and making our Region more sustainable. About 70 percent of the fine sediment that washes into the Lake and reduces its water clarity comes from roads and developed areas.

Fortunately, costly projects to upgrade our roads, bridges, transit systems, and bike trails can achieve multiple

benefits. They can reduce traffic congestion and stormwater pollution while at the same time improving safety, air quality, pedestrian mobility, public access, scenery, parking, quality of life, and economic vitality.

TRPA is working with many partners in and out of the basin to envision, develop, and deliver the transportation system Lake Tahoe deserves.

We're updating our TRPA Regional Transportation Plan and TRPA Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan. We're teaming up with the Tahoe Transportation District to complete a set of comprehensive traffic corridor studies that will identify some of our biggest transportation needs.

We're also working with Tahoe Transportation District on a long-range transit plan to improve connectivity for increased ridership. The plan will identify strategies for an integrated regional transit system with improved connections outside the Basin, and explore options for free-to-rider service.

While those major planning efforts continue, significant work is being done to upgrade roads in our communities.

Last year, California and Nevada transportation departments continued their multi-year water quality program and invested \$130 million in projects to add bike lanes and reduce stormwater pollution on highway 50s, 89 and 207. That work is part of an ongoing effort to improve Lake Tahoe's water quality by upgrading stormwater treatment on area highways.

Placer County started a \$48 million project to revamp Highway 28 through the Kings Beach commercial core. The project will improve traffic flow, pedestrian access, and landscaping, and reduce fine sediment pollution into Lake Tahoe by an estimated 45,000 pounds per year.

South Lake Tahoe rebuilt Harrison Avenue with a new traffic pattern, streetlights, sidewalks, bike paths, and landscaping

to revitalize that commercial corridor and reduce stormwater pollution.

TRPA's new On Our Way grant program awarded \$550,000 in federal funding for local jurisdictions, school districts, and nonprofit groups to identify neighborhood- and community-level projects that can increase walking, bicycling, and public transit use.

Progress will continue this year as El Dorado County finishes its Lake Tahoe Boulevard Enhancement Project to complete a missing link in the bike path network between South Lake Tahoe and Meyers and Tahoe Transportation District starts building a three-mile bike trail from Incline Village to Sand Harbor with \$12 million in federal funding and help from the nonprofit Tahoe Fund, which raised more than \$1 million in private donations for the project.

Other important projects are under environmental review and on the horizon for us to consider, including the Highway 89/Fanny Bridge Community Revitalization Project, the Highway 50/South Shore Community Revitalization Project (aka loop road), and a proposal to restore cross-lake passenger ferry service between the North Shore and South Shore.

Some of our transportation challenges are financial. We need to fix flawed transportation funding formulas that steer dollars into our Region as if it is only a little known, sparsely populated rural area and fail to recognize the millions of people who visit each year, many of them driving up from nearby metropolitan areas and putting significant demand on our infrastructure.

Roundabouts are one tool in helping to solve our transportation challenges. Much more remains to be done. And now is a crucial time for people to be informed, engaged, and vocal about what they want to see happen in the Lake Tahoe Basin because transportation is transformation.

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