

Lake Tahoe trying to inflate cycling economy

By Kathryn Reed

Riding a bike isn't just about getting from Point A to Point B. For some it's more than getting exercise and seeing pretty scenery. Cycling is a big business.

The Outdoor Industry Association's 2012 report found that cyclists spend \$81 billion annually. The bulk of that figure – \$70 billion-plus is on trips, the rest is on gear.

Cyclists tend to spend an average of \$75 a day when they travel compared to other tourists who shell out \$60, they span the age spectrum, they usually stay at least three nights, and it could be individuals, friends or families traveling together.



Lake Tahoe would like to better capitalize on the growing number of cyclists. Photo Copyright 2015 Carolyn

E. Wright

A panel of four spoke May 20 at Lake Tahoe Community College about the South Shore cycling scene – its evolution and what more needs to be done.

Gary Bell, who owns Sierra Ski and Cycle Works and founded TAMBA, said when he moved to South Lake Tahoe in the late 1970s mountain biking didn't exist here. Now people from outside the area come to his shop asking about specific trails they've heard about. The Flume Trail and Mr. Toad's are the most popular.

He notices it's not just twentysomething year olds either. All ages – including families – are on their bikes.

The May issue of *Bike* magazine did a 10-page spread on Tahoe, which Bell is quoted in.

Day trips are huge for cyclists – no matter their tire width. This is something that was pointed out that Tahoe should capitalize on.



“As a premier biking destination we don't have good signage.” – Carol Chaplin, LTVA executive director

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The fact that one-quarter of the people who volunteer at TAMBA trail days proves those outside the area care enough about Tahoe mountain biking to give back.

Carol Chaplin, who heads the Lake Tahoe Visitors Authority, has the job of promoting the region for all levels of cyclists – including the pros. A large amount of credit for bringing the women's Amgen Tour of California to Tahoe can be given to Chaplin.

"We were in it for the PR part of it," Chaplin said. She won't reveal a dollar amount regarding how the town benefitted. She said it cost more than \$200,000 to be the host venue for two days.

Curtis Fong, who organizes the June and September rides around the lake, said combined his events have brought in \$150 million to the community. This is from participants and their friends staying and eating in town as well as spending money on other things.

But it's also up to businesses to take the initiative when events like this occur. When the men's Tour of California almost happened here in 2011 Sprouts had a welcoming sign and the restaurant was hopping with the riders.

In terms of an overall welcome for cyclists, Jason Collin – Lake Tahoe South Shore Chamber of Commerce board member – said promoting an environmentally friendly and healthy lifestyle does this.

Chaplin said in partnership with the chamber businesses have been told it would be advantageous to have bike racks, a place for cyclists to hose or wipe down their bikes – especially for mountain bikes, and laundry capabilities.

In the end, the speakers agreed there is room for improvement

if Lake Tahoe is going to be among the elite destinations for all cyclists.

“As a premier biking destination we don’t have good signage,” Chaplin said.

This, though, is a difficult endeavor on any of the state highways because Caltrans and NDOT make the rules. There are groups like the bike committee that is part of Measure S/R and the Lake Tahoe Bicycle Coalition that are working on wayfinding on paths and side streets.

It was also acknowledged that a survey should be conducted to gather more input about who is cycling here. It was pointed out that various agencies from the Tahoe Rim Trail Association to the U.S. Forest Service to Tahoe Regional Planning Agency do various surveys but the data has not been coalesced nor is it readily available to the public.

Chaplin said a detailed user survey is something the LTVA could do, though it costs money. The LTVA marketing committee will be discussing the 2015-16 budget at its May 26 meeting. Chaplin said important information to find out is the gaps the area has when it comes to cycling so those can be addressed.