

# Letter: Reasons to stop Fanny Bridge project

***Publisher's note: This letter was originally sent to Ricardo Suarez, division director of Central Federal Lands Highway Division, regarding the Fanny Bridge Community Revitalization Project. It was then sent to Lake Tahoe News for publication.***

Dear Mr. Suarez,

I would like to thank the Central Federal Lands Highway Division and your staff members Michael Davies and Matt Ambroziak for their involvement in the proposed SR89/Fanny Bridge Community Revitalization Project located in the Lake Tahoe Basin. Based on continuing concerns from residents and business owners with the direction and justification of the proposed project, I am requesting your involvement.

In the 1994 Tahoe City Community Plan the concept of a proposed bypass through the 64 acre recreational area in Tahoe City was first introduced. In 1994 the yearly traffic growth was approx. 2.5 percent with levels of service through the commercial core at a level "F". In 1994 there were no sidewalks and parking was random through the commercial core of Tahoe City. Cars would park wherever they could find room and would back up into lanes of moving traffic resulting in the low levels of service. Sidewalks and standardized parking in the commercial core of Tahoe City was completed in approximately 1998. In 1994 based on an anticipated continued traffic growth, the concept of a future bypass was justified. Being 21 years ago things have changed. Traffic has declined (1992-2010 reduction noted at 23-26 percent) with last year showing no growth or a minor growth of approximately 0.1 percent. Other changes that have occurred in the last 21 years have been toward the movement in providing alternative forms of transportation with the construction of a \$12 million

transit center located next to Fanny Bridge. Based on these changes the justification for the proposed bypass 21 years ago has also changed.

In the 2002 Project Study Report the concept of a proposed bypass once again surfaced. At this time there were three alternatives which included a bypass through the 64 acre recreational area and a fourth alternative to widen or replace Fanny Bridge to better accommodate bicycles and pedestrians. Annual traffic growth rates over the last 10 years were again noted at 2.5 percent.

As a full-time resident of the Tahoe City Community my involvement in the SR89/Fanny Bridge Community Revitalization project began in December 2011 when after reading the project description provided by the Tahoe Transportation District (TTD) and later the California Access Program Project Application in 2013. It was noted during my review of this information that the information provided to the Central Federal Lands Highway Division was falsified and did not represent the actual conditions of the project area.

On Nov. 10, 2014, I provided a letter to the Federal Lands Highway Division noting the false information provided by the TTD in the California Access Program Project Application. Since the time that this information was disclosed, representatives from the Central Federal Lands Highway Division have been more involved in the project and have made multiple visits to the project site. Projected traffic counts were also found to be inaccurate. The project is titled SR89/Fanny Bridge Community Revitalization Project. There is nothing at all about this project that will revitalize the community. The economic study misrepresented the actual impacts of the project. The final EIR was attempted to be voted on for approval by the TTD after four days of releasing the multi-hundred page document. The final EIR is also skewed to support an unjustified project. As a member of the Citizens Review Committee we were told we had no vote. It was apparent

that the committee was being moved toward Alternative No. 1 by consultants hired by the TTD. Our Placer County supervisor also told us a year ago that the decision was already made toward Alternative No. 1. Businesses that will be bypassed have stated their concerns with comments from the design team of potential lost revenue. Homeowners who now back up to open space and a recreational area along Granlibakken Road now have to disclose that a new section of highway is planned below their property; causing a loss in their home value. The bike counts stated in the funding application were found to be taken at the bike trail bridge at 64 acres not on Fanny Bridge as stated. Fanny Bridge was found to not be structurally deficient and ready to fall in the river as stated. The June 2014 Caltrans Bridge Report states that all of the major components of Fanny Bridge are structurally sound. The Caltrans Bridge Report notes an estimated project cost of \$672,000.00 for required repairs to Fanny Bridge. The TTD has stated that this minimal project cost is based off using unit costs from 1995. Caltrans is yet to confirm the truth to this statement.

All of the published information provided to the public in the newspaper right up until almost the close of the draft EIR period only showed the existing Fanny Bridge. It wasn't until a few members of the public requested that the public be shown elevations of the proposed height of the bypass bridge, roundabouts and elevated roadway through 64 acres. A special meeting was scheduled with simulation models provided in February of this year. It took three years after the project was restarted to show the public the real scope of the proposed project. The time period for comments on the draft EIR had to be extended to allow for public generated from that meeting. The TTD had no intention of truly showing the public the actual scope of this project until the Central Federal Lands Highway Division stepped in. Being involved in every aspect of this project for the last four years, I had no idea that both roundabouts and the roadway through 64 acres were

elevated until I found this information in the hundreds of pages of the draft EIR. Imagine what the general public thought when all they saw were pictures of Fanny Bridge and a title stating that Fanny Bridge was going to be revitalized.

When I started on this project four years ago all of the proposed build alternatives included a bypass through 64 acres. It was based on my involvement that the proposed alternative with replacing the existing Y with a roundabout was drafted. From the very beginning the design team did all they could to discard this alternative. I was first told the roundabout would not fit within the area of the Y. Then I was told the roundabout would not meet the project goals and objectives. The TTD rejected the roundabout for these reasons. With a continued request from myself and other members of the community the roundabout alternative (6A) stayed in; however, the design team did not work toward a successful design. I have worked diligently with the design team to come up with a comparison to the bypass which is buildable. The current proposed roundabout under Option No. 2 at the wye intersection resulted from a phone call and request by the Central Federal Lands Highway Division to the design team to remove the signalized intersection. Interesting how it would not work under my request.

In reviewing Appendix G of the final EIR there are many factors noted that currently exist that impact the traffic flow at Fanny Bridge and the wye which are not related to the actual volume of traffic. Noted are the random seven mid-block uncontrolled pedestrian crossings known to occur in the study area likely would result in lower average travel speeds and levels of service. Drivers on northbound SR89 react to the presence of large amounts of pedestrian and bicycle traffic adjacent to their travel lane by slowing down significantly. This lower travel speed reduces the vehicular capacity of northbound 89. Also, vehicular traffic is frequently required to stop at a pedestrian crossing signal at the south end of

the bridge where significant pedestrian and bicycle traffic crosses SR89. This causes further reduction in SR 89 travel capacity at the south end of Fanny Bridge. These influences reduce the capacity of Fanny Bridge below that of the SR 89 roadway, so the bridge is effectively the limiting factor in the capacity of this segment of SR89. With Mackinaw Street and parking access on both sides of SR89 by the Dam Café this creates the potential for a variety of unexpected and uncontrolled traffic movements. Such as vehicles backing toward oncoming traffic. This lack of driver expectancy results in further slowing down/stopping of vehicular traffic which leads to decrease capacity on SR89 at the north end of the bridge. There are two areas where three lanes of traffic merge into one lane of traffic within 200 feet, which also results in confusion and congestion on the north side of Fanny Bridge. Driver behavior is noted when drivers often force their way into slow-moving through traffic streams on SR89, or drivers on SR89 courteously wave side street drivers ahead of them. This situation wherein side street traffic gains "priority" over major street traffic as a result of driver yielding behavior is one of the factors in further reducing the traffic capacity of SR89 through the wye intersection area during peak saturated demand conditions. Unfamiliar drivers visiting the area for recreation generally react to the observed conditions by traveling at a slower speed. Traffic conditions at peak times on SR28 east exceed capacity. Lack of capacity on SR28 through Tahoe City and the uncontrolled intersection of Grove St. contribute to the long queues on northbound SR89 in the vicinity of Fanny Bridge and the existing Y intersection.

Also noted in Appendix G, "However, a calibration to match real world conditions was not performed as part of this analysis. Calibrating simulation models is a time-intensive effort that involves multiple data collection efforts across all modes of travel. For instance, the pedestrian/bicyclist activity at the Fanny Bridge signal crossing and other mid-

block pedestrian crossings on eastbound SR28 between the existing Y and Grove Street would have to be counted and entered as model inputs.”

In summary of Appendix G – There is a large list of items that effect the traffic flow at Fanny Bridge and the Y that need to be corrected. None of which are corrected under the proposed. These corrections should be addressed or accepted as is and their results reviewed prior to moving forward with the proposed bypass.

TRPA notes that a level of service E is “targeted”. Further noted is “the level of service may be exceeded when provisions for multi-modal amenities and/or services such as transit, bicycling and walking facilities are adequate to provide mobility for users at a level that is proportional to the project-generated traffic in relation to overall traffic conditions on affected roadways.” The area around Fanny Bridge has safe bicycle and walking facilities. The existing transit center was constructed as a “park and ride” facility to minimize traffic congestion during peak times. The transit center is far from being used to capacity. Constructing an additional section of highway has been shown to further minimize the possibility of getting motorists to use alternative forms of transportation.

In meeting with the staff of Sen. Dianne Feinstein and reviewing the Lake Tahoe Restoration Act, it is noted that forest management activities should be conducted that help achieve and maintain the environmental threshold carrying capacities established by the TRPA, unless the attainment of such benefits would excessively increase the project’s cost in relation to the additional benefits gained. While this project is not a forest management project, one would believe the same cost and environmental concerns would apply. Under Alternative No. 1 the only positive is the shorter travel distance of approximately 200 yards for the vehicles on SR89 traveling from Squaw to the west shore. The negatives are added pavement

through a forested recreational area, added pavement in an SEZ area, removal of over 400 trees, financial impacts to businesses and homeowners, noise and light pollution closer to homes, scenic impacts of a multi-lane bridge over the river, scenic impacts of the raised roundabouts and highway, relocation of the high pressure sewer line, added road sand becoming air born and impacting lake clarity at a cost of \$33 million. A reconfigured Y intersection at a minimal cost with minimal environmental impacts, no added road sand, no added pavement, no financial impact to the businesses or homeowners, provides for an incentive for use of the existing transit system. Based on information established by the Lake Tahoe Restoration Act, the proposed project under Alternative No. 1 is unjustified based on the benefits gained by constructing the proposed bypass through a forested recreational area at a cost of \$33 million with major disturbance to the irreplaceable environment for traffic that may exist 5 percent of the year. There is nowhere in the state of California that does not experience some form of "congestion" during peak times especially for only 5 percent of the year.

The only agencies which support this project are: Caltrans who will be getting a new section of highway and entry with a refurbished maintenance yard at no cost. Homewood Resort who is required to mitigate traffic to their proposed \$500 million resort through the Fanny Bridge area which supports why Placer County is offering funding for the bypass project and the willingness to take over the annual maintenance on Old 89 and Fanny Bridge. Placer County will be collecting transient occupancy tax on the proposed Homewood Resort which will far outweigh their upfront and annual expenses. The Homewood Resort also requires the construction of a waste water treatment plant which brings a financial interest to the Tahoe City PUD. The PUD will be collecting water and sewer fees from the Homewood Resort as well as TOT dollars from the county to maintain the bike trails in the area. The only justification for the proposed bypass is to support the construction of the

Homewood Resort at the expense of federal and county taxpayers.

There is a lot more development needed before we reach a successful project that benefits our environment, community and businesses. Let's take that time. I am proposing addressing the intersection of Grove Street by installing a signal and working on the seven uncontrolled pedestrian crosswalks through Tahoe City before moving forward with a project that involves the large impact to Tahoe's irreplaceable environment, our business community and homeowners with a bypass.

I request your support in having the design team work with the TRPA, Bureau of Reclamation and Caltrans to comply with the guidelines and the cost vs benefit direction noted in the Lake Tahoe Restoration Act for a project that does not include a bypass. In summary there is a lot more to this proposed project than your agency expected based on the title of a "community revitalization". Having the lead project manager for the TTD just recently resign may also be a red flag to the justification of this proposed project.

Sincerely,

**Jim Sajdak, resident; Carl Cox, business owner; Larry Boehm, homeowner**