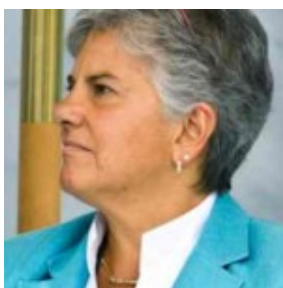


Opinion: A truly bikeable Tahoe is possible

By Joanne Marchetta

We face some big, daunting environmental restoration challenges here at Lake Tahoe. But helping our environment every day can be as simple as riding a bike, walking, or taking transit. And the hundreds of people who participated in the Tahoe Bike Challenge this June, including many of our employees at the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency, are showing how big of an impact our individual actions can have.

The Tahoe Bike Challenge's concept is simple: For the first two weeks of June, leave your car parked as often as possible and bike, walk, or take transit to get around, for your own health and the health of our environment. Vehicles are a major emissions source for carbon dioxide, a greenhouse gas that is linked to climate change, and nitrogen, a harmful pollutant that gets deposited from the atmosphere into our Lake and fuels algae growth.



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In this year's bike challenge, 315 people made 2,706 trips totaling 17,299 miles. By biking instead of driving, participants prevented an estimated 18,663 pounds of carbon dioxide emissions and saved an estimated \$3,845 in fuel purchases – all in just two weeks.

The Tahoe Bike Challenge is in its 10th year. It's amazing to see how the event has grown from a small challenge among a few TRPA employees to a basinwide competition with agencies, businesses, and nonprofit groups forming more than 40 teams to see who can make the most bike trips to help the environment and earn a little bit in the way of bragging rights. The friendly competition also bolsters the ever-growing spirit of partnership and teamwork at Tahoe and TRPA is proud to play a role in this positive evolution.

The goal is to get people riding bikes and keep them riding bikes. To help, the Lake Tahoe Bicycle Coalition has made the Tahoe Bike Map available on its website. It's the Tahoe Region's most comprehensive bike trail map, and will help anyone find just the kind of bike ride they are looking for, whether that's a leisurely trip for the family, a better route to pedal to work or school, or a tough mountain bike trail.

Many of our employees at TRPA will be riding bikes, walking, or taking transit instead of driving for the rest of this month, and hopefully for the rest of the summer. We encourage you to do the same. Biking is not just good for our environment, it's good for our health.

Every year TRPA uses the Tahoe Bike Challenge as a way to raise donations for our Environmental Scholarship Fund, which means biking is also good for our high school students. The fund has awarded 26 scholarships totaling \$10,850 to local students to help them study environmental fields in college. After graduating, those students go on to help the environment around the world, and right here in our own communities.

Our Tahoe Talks Brown Bag Lunch Series this June is focusing on two bike-related topics. A June 17 lunch focused on legal rights and issues for pedestrians and bicyclists, and how laws could be improved so all citizens have rights to safe mobility. A June 24 lunch will focus on law enforcement programs that can raise awareness about traffic safety and

improve safety for all road users.

TRPA recognizes that our communities need improved transportation infrastructure and transit services to offer easy-to-use options to the personal automobile at Tahoe. Partners in the collaborative Environmental Improvement Program have built 137 miles of bike and pedestrian routes since 1997, with more than 30 miles completed in the last five years. More projects are under way. That includes Caltrans water quality improvement projects that incorporate bike lane and sidewalk upgrades for our highways; the Sawmill Bike Path that El Dorado County is building between South Lake Tahoe and Meyers; a new bike park in South Lake Tahoe; a new mountain bike park and new mountain bike trails at Heavenly Mountain Resort; and a new three-mile bike trail from Incline Village to Sand Harbor.

Our goal at TRPA is to have a fully-developed bike trail system at Tahoe within five years. It's an ambitious goal, but one we think is possible. More and more you'll be hearing the mantra that transportation is transformation – of our lake, communities, and economy. In fact, making communities at Tahoe more walkable and bikeable is a central goal in our Regional Plan and progress continues to be made. There are many ways people can help. Sometimes it's as simple as riding your bike instead of driving your car, taking a public survey to inform transportation policies, or watching out for bikers when you're driving. Please help us turn our vision for Tahoe as a safe walking and biking mecca into reality.

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