

Police, bike advocates work to make roads safer

By Kathryn Reed

Most fatalities involving a vehicle in South Lake Tahoe are the result of a bicyclist or pedestrian being hit, not cars crashing into each other.

The police department is in the preliminary stages of building a campaign to make people more aware of others who are on the road. The Lake Tahoe Bicycle Coalition wants to be part of that message.

At a meeting in late June police Sgts. Shannon Laney and Shannon Norrgard spoke to a group of residents – mostly cycling advocates – about options, funding and solutions.

In the city limits in 2012 there were three deaths, one in 2013 and three in 2014 involving a vehicle hitting either a cyclist or pedestrian.

The No. 1 factor in the deaths is drivers under the influence, then failing to yield, and third is pedestrians not in a sidewalk, according to Laney.



Sgt. Shannon Laney listens to ideas about how the public could help with bike safety in South Lake Tahoe. Photo/Kathryn Reed

It was pointed out how there is blame on all sides for accidents and fatalities. No matter the mode of transit – including walking – people are not always following the rules. Bicyclists are under the same laws as motor vehicles.

Laney said it could be difficult to catch up to cyclists who are violating the laws, especially riding on the wrong side of the street. It has to do with traffic and being able to flip a U-turn, and then whether that infraction rises to a level of importance to be worth chasing down.

South Lake Tahoe has an ordinance that makes it illegal to cross Highway 50 outside of a crosswalk. With crosswalks at times being quite a distance, many pedestrians opt to jaywalk. It is up to Caltrans to add crosswalks.

A new law in California says motorists must give cyclists 3 feet of space. Laney said that's pretty hard to enforce until there has been a collision. That's when citations get written. He said it would take a sting operation or dedicated personnel to actively enforce that law. Manpower is an issue.

That is where the Bicycle Coalition might be able to play a role. It could work on securing grants that would pay for increased patrols for bike related enforcement as well as education material.

Education, all sides agreed, is one component that has been missing. This would be for cyclists and drivers.

Norrgard mentioned how it would be great to blast a message about the 3-foot law so more people would know about it. Eventually it would be engrained in people's heads and then behavior would change without having to think about it. It might be similar to when 10 years ago the "click it or ticket"

campaign was foreign, but now most people know it is about buckling up.

Cycling activist Curtis Fong said handing out literature at key intersections could be the first step to start educating people about the rules of the road – whether one is on two wheels or behind a wheel.

Both sides agreed to work more closely with one another.