

# Opinion: Federal highway bill good for Tahoe

By Carl Hasty

The five-year, \$305 billion federal transportation bill passed by Congress and signed into law Dec. 4 by President Obama includes a provision that will steer additional money to Lake Tahoe communities for roadway improvements and enhanced public transit service.

The Fixing America's Surface Transportation (FAST) Act is the first long-term federal transportation bill in nearly a decade. The bill will provide greater certainty and stability for state and local governments working to improve their transportation networks.



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Unlike other designated metropolitan planning areas, Lake Tahoe's rural classification left it at a disadvantage for federal support due to a technical flaw in the rules. The new legislation amends current law and will steer formula based federal funding to Lake Tahoe for road improvements and transit service. This key measure will allow the Tahoe Transportation District and Tahoe communities to upgrade transportation infrastructure to improve the environment, enhance public recreation, and revitalize communities.

This changes the metrics for us. The heavy urban use of the

basin did not align with limited transportation funding so critical to the protection and vitality of Lake Tahoe.

The diligent effort of the TTD to modify the status was supported by the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency and transportation partners as well as delegations from California and Nevada.

This bill will help to create an inter-regional transit system in the next five years as well as corridor improvements related to safety, environment, economy, and quality of life.

Research has proven Tahoe is one of the most heavily visited national forest areas. Previous studies also indicate that over 70 percent of the particulates impacting lake clarity originate from the transportation system and built environment. Fine sediment pollution from roads and developed areas is the leading cause of declines in Lake Tahoe's famed water clarity. Vehicles are also a major source of emissions that pollute the air and fuel algae growth once in the Lake.

"For years, federal regulations have put Tahoe at a disadvantage because of our small, year-round population. This bill changes important formulas to take into account the millions of people who visit Tahoe's extensive public lands," said Joanne Marchetta, executive director of TRPA. "TRPA and our transportation district partners have been working together with our congressional delegation for years on this critical fix in order to upgrade our transportation infrastructure and transit services."

"Tahoe Transportation District's leadership has redefined the approach and execution of projects in a timely manner," said Carlos Monje Jr., assistant secretary for transportation policy at U.S. Department of Transportation. "We are looking forward to growing our partnerships with the Basin, and to additional projects in Nevada and California."

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*District.*