

TTD steering loop road project to completion



The city-county street looping to the left behind the casinos may one day be Highway 50. Photo/Provided

By Kathryn Reed

Planning for the South Shore's loop road is nearing the finish line, with no intention of going to the voters even if that were a possibility.

Carl Hasty, executive director for the Tahoe Transportation District – the lead agency for the project, believes between the information that has been provided and the future opportunities for the public to weigh in that people have had ample opportunity to voice their opinions.

This bi-state agency, if it were to get the go-ahead from the California and Nevada departments of transportation, could reroute Highway 50 behind Harrah's Lake Tahoe and MontBleu casinos and turn the current highway into a city street

without South Lake Tahoe's blessing. TTD is a federal entity that has a higher level of authority than a city or county.

The City Council could put an advisory question to voters asking if they want the loop road or not. The outcome, though, would not be a mandate. The council could still support or not support the project, and TTD doesn't have to listen to the voters or the council.

It could hurt TTD if the council were to come out against the project because it would likely make it more difficult to get federal funding.

And if eminent domain were needed to acquire property, TTD would need the city to make that happen. It would take four out of the five council members to reverse current policy that bans the use of eminent domain.

The goal of TTD is to turn just more than a mile of the current Highway 50 at the state line into a road managed by South Lake Tahoe and Douglas County, and make the current local street behind the casinos into a highway. The purpose is to make the commercial area more walkable and inviting.

Hasty did not know if the realignment would save drivers time. The focus is on flow. He also could not tell *Lake Tahoe News* what the speed limits on the respective roads might be. Today there are four traffic lights on Highway 50 in the stretch that will be affected. The new route would have two, at Heavenly Way and Harrah's.

Tuesday night was the most recent opportunity for people to give input. More than 100 people spent time Dec. 1 at Lake Tahoe Resort Hotel looking at the five alternatives, including one to do nothing. People were asked based on the exhibits what they thought of the possibility of affordable housing, mixed use buildings, gateway features, site options and if they had any general comments to make.

Mike Riley has been listening to the loop road talk for 20 years. He called Tuesday's presentation the best he has seen to date. He supports the concept, but is worried about the people who would be displaced, and wonders who will be responsible for the upkeep of the trail from MontBleu to Van Sickle Bi-State Park.

Mark Cuthright has driven Lake Parkway-Montreal Road (the roads that could become a federal highway) after it snows. The grade makes it sketchy, he said. He questions the logic of having people on that stretch of road instead of the flat and straight highway of today.

For Dave Kurtzman, he likes the mix of affordable housing, and the possibility of getting federal money to make it a reality.

For all of this to come to fruition as TTD envisions, no properties on the Nevada side would be adversely affected. On the California side it's a completely different story. Multiple residences and businesses would be bulldozed, likely starting before the current easterly intersection of Highway 50 and Pioneer Trail in South Lake Tahoe and then going back toward Montreal Road.

Mike McKeen, who owns the property where Naked Fish and Powder House are located, was initially a staunch opponent of project, going so far as to create signs saying as much that were outside the businesses. Today he is a proponent, envisioning a revamping of his property.

His biggest concern now is where people will park if the new commercial and residential structures are built.

For Hasty, what he likes is the evolution of the plan into what he calls a true community revitalization project.

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Notes:

- South Lake Tahoe City Council will get an update on the project Dec. 7. The meeting at Lake Tahoe Airport starts at 9am.
- There will be an open house Jan. 26 from 5-7pm at Lake Tahoe Resort Hotel.
- The draft environmental studies are expected to be released in the first quarter of 2016. People will have 60 days to comment.