

Public gets answers to loop road questions

By Kathryn Reed

By August the Tahoe Transportation District expects to have the necessary approvals from the various entities to go forward with the loop road on the South Shore.

What is expected to be a \$75 million construction project would reroute Highway 50 at about Pioneer Trail on the east, go behind Harrah's-MontBleu and come out at a roundabout at Lake Parkway. The current highway then becomes a street to be maintained by South Lake Tahoe and Douglas County.

About 80 people attended a meeting Feb. 10 at South Tahoe Middle School, with just about that many questions asked of the three-member panel. Answering the questions were Carl Hasty, district manager of the Tahoe Transportation District; Russ Nygaard with TTD; and Mark Rayback, project engineer with Wood Rodgers.

Some of the questions from the public and the answers:

Q: Where will the money come from to pay for the construction?

A: Mostly the federal government. It is too soon know what percentage will come from any one source. No construction dollars have been secured. The project, per federal law, cannot begin until it is fully funded.

Q: Where has the money to date come from?

A: Primarily the federal government, with some from Nevada Public Lands. About \$3 million has been spent so far.

Q: Will South Lake Tahoe taxpayers foot any of the bills?

A: Not for the construction.

Q: *The millions of dollars the project is expected to cost – what will that buy? In other words, will it pay for all of the improvements presented in the pictures at the various meetings or will it just pay for land acquisition, relocation of residents/businesses, the highway and the overpass?*

A: It pays for almost everything, including relocation of utilities if need be. There is some question as to whether **South Tahoe Public Utility District's \$10 million** price tag to do so was realistic. Landscaping – but not the maintenance of it – is covered, as is narrowing the current highway to one lane in each direction. It pays for the overpass, but not that maintenance. The structure will be Caltrans' obligation, while snow removal could fall to State Parks.

Q: *Why put in a roundabout instead of a light at the east side?*

A: There will be better movement and lower speeds, plus it allows for creative landscaping.

Q: *How much low-income housing will be built?*

A: It depends on the alternative that is selected. Between 65 and 200 deed restricted units could be built. Where they are built is still to be decided. It does not have to be at that end of town. Between 47 and 90 residents could be displaced. (The discrepancy between numbers was not explained.) Anyone over age 18 is eligible for relocation assistance. The federal Uniform Act is what TTD must follow in regards to relocation assistance. It is estimated to cost \$2 million for the relocation aspect of the project.

Q: *Will there be a left turn lane out of Tahoe Meadows?*

A: No, the project doesn't go that far west.

Q: *How many businesses will be impacted in South Lake Tahoe*

and Douglas County?

A: Three to six in the city, zero in the county.

Q: *What is the current assessed value of the properties that will be affected?*

A: The appraisal has not been done.

Q: *How does the project affect the tax base?*

A: More taxes should be collected based on the property values being higher.

Q: *Caltrans stats show traffic has declined in the state line area in the last two decades, so why do this project?*

A: Counts at Echo Summit are up, so the vehicles are here; they are just finding other routes near state line like Pioneer Trail. (This project will not enhance Pioneer Trail.)

Q: *Could Caltrans use eminent domain and bypass the wishes of South Lake Tahoe?*

A: Yes.

Q: *What are the environmental concerns?*

A: Noise is likely No. 1. All of the TRPA thresholds like air and water quality, scenic; plus green house gases are big for California. Noise could be mitigated with a sound wall, using a special pavement, or with open space and berms.

Q: *How will the fire departments be impacted?*

A: They won't be.

Q: *Will the public have a say in the design?*

A: Yes.

Q: *Why will there be a light behind Harrah's and will this*

slow down traffic?

A: Future projections are that traffic flows warrant a light there; it will not impede flow.

Q: *Why not make the entire casino corridor open only to pedestrians?*

A: The city and county still could, but that suggestion never rose to the level to be studied in the environmental documents.

Q: *Why not use Heavenly Way or go behind Harveys-Hard Rock?*

A: Both are not feasible when it comes to design and rights-of-way, number of driveways, and because of existing stormwater detention basins.

Q: *Why not take the project to the voters?*

A: Not TTD's decision; it would be highly unusual.

Q: *Can the project go forward without South Lake Tahoe's approval?*

A: No.

Q: *What about a tunnel?*

A: It was looked at and is not feasible.

Q: *What about snow removal?*

A: It will likely be pushed farther west into a middle lane and then disposed of as it is today.

—

Notes:

· The videotape of Wednesday's meeting will be edited and then made available on the **TTD's website** in what

representatives hope will be no more than a week.

- The environmental impact report will be released this quarter; with people having 60 days to comment on it. The final document will be out the second quarter of the year.

- Agencies needing to sign off on either the environmental documents, permits, rights-of-way, and/or transfer of road ownership include: Tahoe Regional Planning Agency's Advisory Planning Commission and Governing Board, Tahoe Transportation District board, South Lake Tahoe City Council, Douglas County Commission, Federal Highway Administration, Caltrans and Nevada Department of Transportation.