

Opinion: Loop road is essential to South Shore

By Carl Hasty

The South Shore of Lake Tahoe is divided by lines. These state, county, and city lines work well on a map, but they do not define the day-to-day reality of the people who live and work in this community. In the last decade we have seen definitive projects reshape South Shore – Heavenly Village, Lakeview Commons, Harrison Avenue streetscape. We have seen new bike trails and the opening of a bi-state park.

Tahoe Transportation District's Highway 50 South Shore Community Revitalization Project is the next step. It goes well beyond transportation to building the community we want to live and work in, and like the projects before it, it won't be easy, but things that matter rarely are. The future potential gains are worth it for our residents, businesses, and visitors.



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We only need look to the North Shore and the success of Kings Beach, the Incline Gateway, and the construction that will start this summer on both Highway 89/Fanny Bridge Community Revitalization and the Highway 28 National Scenic Byway to see the future. By realigning Highway 50 from Pioneer Trail in California to Lake Parkway in Nevada behind the casinos on the mountain side, we open the possibility for a “complete street”

transformation to include everyone, not only motorists, but pedestrians, bicyclists, and public transit users.

We open the potential for economic development and business revitalization. We add an avenue to respond to the resident's housing needs with improved, attractive, affordable, mixed use housing projects to replace the combination of retired housing and business units: 53-97 depending on the chosen alternative.

Highway 50 South Shore Community Revitalization Project has suffered at times from the long shadow of failed projects of the past. Many have asked if this project is doomed to repeat the mistakes of its predecessors. The answer is no.

We have learned and listened. Since January 2012, public comment has been garnered through a series of 140 community open houses and workshops, service club presentations, business and community review committees, and eight City Council presentations.

South Shore community members know what they want:

- A more attractive community to complement the surrounding mountains and lake;
- Less traffic congestion and environmental impacts – a previous study indicated that 70 percent of the pollutants impacting Lake Tahoe's clarity come from transportation systems and developed area run-off;
- Economic improvement and health with opportunities for businesses large and small to flourish;
- Safer streets and more walking and biking paths;
- Better and affordable housing for our workforce.

The community also has concerns:

- The construction will take away businesses and homes

that will not be replaced for years;

- It will cost the city taxpayer revenue and it will disrupt businesses and the community like past project holes;
- Other areas of the city need attention.

All of these are legitimate concerns, but there are solutions. This project can be done in phases. Rights-of-ways can be acquired without tearing down structures. Replacement housing could be completed before the current infrastructure is demolished, thus ensuring no lax in property tax revenues for the city and minimal disruption to the community as possible. Do other areas need attention? Yes. This project is just one in a string of projects working to improve South Shore.

From where will the funding for this bold, new South Shore be derived? Federal and state funding will make up the bulk with private sector and some local government funds from Douglas County. We are not looking to the city of South Lake Tahoe to finance this project.

Will everyone support this project? No. In fact, some people would rather put this to a vote. They would abandon the public project process that has directly shaped this plan to date. Others think since the current infrastructure works for them, why do anything at all? Yet, there is a cost to doing nothing. The community can't afford to paralyze the positive momentum that's been moving South Lake Tahoe forward these past few years as a more desirable community to live and visit.

The "Nevada versus California," "big versus small" contention is a non-starter and a red herring. It's long gone, overplayed, overdone and divisive. This community depends on each other. This project is about the entire South Shore and what locals want in their future. It's a catalyst and one in a series of transportation enhancements to create a connection system not only for South Lake Tahoe but the Tahoe Basin.

The five alternatives for Highway 50 are currently undergoing an environmental impact report on the environment, costs, benefits, and concerns. Public comment will be accepted for 60 days after the draft is released. We are going to take the next couple of months to continue to work with the community and business owners to address these concerns.

We welcome the public's opinions – as we have the past four years. These proactive opinions and suggestions have guided and impacted this project in a positive way.

Examples of the benefits of “complete street” projects like this one can be found across the United States, and in cities and towns comparable to South Lake Tahoe. This is not speculative. This is fact.

Is this going to be hard? Yes. Is this going to be smooth? No. Will it be worth it? Absolutely, and with community involvement we can accomplish it.

Be a part of the continued renaissance of South Shore and get involved. Your time will help shape our collective future.

For more information, go **online**.

Carl Hasty is district manager of Tahoe Transportation District.