

Opinion: A better plan for the Stateline area

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By Taylor Flynn

I'll come right out and say it. I'm opposed to the loop road.

But it's not because I'm a naysayer – it's because I'm an optimist.



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It's because I think there are better solutions for our community and for Lake Tahoe.

But before I get to the answers, let me first hit on a few points where I believe the loop road proposal falls short.

For one, I don't think the Powers That Be are being forthcoming about development plans involving open space tied to the loop road, especially the Edgewood Mountain property that I discussed last month.

Another is that the loop road would essentially barricade the mountain from the town with a fast-moving, noisy, four-lane freeway. This, at a time when we are trying to enhance recreation and connect our town to the outdoors with the Van Sickle Campground, hiking trails and other recreational

activities up on Heavenly.

Third, as we all know, there are huge obstacles and problems associated with putting a freeway through a residential neighborhood: lost housing, lost property tax revenue, eminent domain, traffic impacts to Pioneer Trail and negative impacts to the remaining neighborhood.

Fourth, loop roads tend to work in directing traffic around aesthetically pleasing, mostly older, charming and often historic downtowns like Livermore. Frankly, I don't see the Stateline casino corridor ever being, well... charming. Rather, I see a narrow wind tunnel surrounded by concrete and glass high rises. Not exactly our best asset.

Most importantly, the loop road proposal is not something that comes from the heart of our town. It did not come about as a collaborative effort with our community rising up and saying, "This is what we want and need." Rather, it's a "top down" idea that was sprung on us and was almost a done deal, back-door style, when the Mountain News blew the whistle on that process back in 2012.

OK, now the good stuff. Here are my solutions to all things loop road.

"Lake Tahoe Village"

One of the main problems with the South Shore is the major lack of public access to Lake Tahoe.

So, as long as we're going to dream about a tourist core that's truly walkable and bikable to the lake, why not do it right and put it closer to the lake?

Let's establish a "village" centered around that totally underutilized block of turf right across the street from Lake Tahoe along Lakeshore Drive.

We could maintain the open space as the village plaza, and

have a retail and restaurant district right on the lake.

Whereas Heavenly Village is a retail center tied to the gondola and the mountain, this would provide a second village tied to the lake.

There's got to be a way to take down the stupid fence along the beach and open up the waterfront to the public. We could even revamp the playground into something wonderful and attractive for families. If you've ever been to Dennis the Menace Park in Monterey, you will understand what dreaming is really about.

What's cool is that this "in-fill development" would be totally within the confines of the already established urban boundary and would instantly revitalize the "quad" motel district back there – perhaps Tahoe's most blighted area.

And while you might have to remove a handful of old motels, it would be far better than using eminent domain to take over upwards of nearly 100 homes under the loop road proposal.

Housing

One of the elements of the loop road proposal that the Tahoe Regional Young Professionals say they are most attracted to is the prospect of affordable housing. The Tahoe Prosperity Center has also identified the affordable housing problem, but is groping for answers.

The TTD admits that it has no funding for this in the loop road proposal, and the affordable housing they allude to is big, developer-built and government-subsidized apartment complexes. Not exactly the American Dream.

Here's a better solution that communities elsewhere have used to satisfy their low-income housing needs while also benefitting the middle class.

Allow single family homes in Tahoe to establish "granny

units." What this would do is basically allow legal duplexes on single-family lots that have enough land coverage.

With the prospect of added rental income, buying a home in Tahoe would become much more affordable for families who want stay and live here.

Meanwhile, the "granny units" would act as affordable housing units for ski resort employees, college students, service industry workers and others (including grandmothers!).

The coolest part about this is that it would act as a kind of immersion program (think Bijou School) to bring otherwise transient or culturally isolated residents into the fold of Tahoe's middle class neighborhoods.

To me, this is much better than cordoning off poor people into institutional housing projects where kids are forced to play along busy roads, or worse, along four-lane highways.

Marketing

This winter, we have all dealt with the frustration of heavy skier traffic leaving on Sunday afternoons.

The problem, of course, is that there is just too much volume at pinch points in Meyers, Pioneer Trail and along Highway 50 over the mountains.

But rather than view this as a transportation problem, a better solution is to view it as marketing opportunity.

The Stateline casinos and Heavenly, in particular, could benefit while also improving their guest experience, by marketing to folks coming from the east rather than the west.

Think about it.

To the west, we have two-lane roads over the Sierra Nevada crest, but to the east, Highway 50 offers four lanes all the

way to Carson City. And, with the new freeway currently under construction, there will soon be four lanes all the way to Reno.

As we know, Reno and the surrounding area is growing by leaps and bounds, what with the coming of the Tesla Factory, Apple and more; plus, we now have easier access to the Reno-Tahoe International Airport. Rather than view Reno as competition, we need to see Nevada's newfound affluence as an opportunity – as part of our customer base.

The idea is to trade some of our California visitors for those coming in from Nevada to create a better experience for all (including our own residents).

Transportation

To me, Highway 50 through the casino corridor is exactly where it belongs – in a bustling urban environment.

Many businesses even use the roadway to their advantage, like Stateline Brewery where patrons – who want to see and be seen – dine outside along the road's edge.

I personally think a much better use of federal highway funds would be to improve pedestrian safety in the existing casino core. Rather than build a four-lane freeway between us and the mountain, and then have to build bridges over the freeway, we could simply use the money to construct pedestrian bridges over the existing roadway.

Truly, a better solution for all.

Well, there you have it. Those are my answers that I suspect will generate all kinds of naysaying from the very people who accuse others of being naysayers with no answers.

But if you notice, my answers are not about paving over paradise with a parking lot – or a freeway – but turning an existing parking lot into paradise.

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