

Letter: Cave Rock project should be stopped

To the community,

NDOT is in the process of "selling" the Tahoe community on its plans for an extension of the Cave Rock tunnel. Their proffered justification is that our community needs such a tunnel extension to prevent future accidents that might be caused by rocks falling from the Cave formation.

This is not a good idea. Indeed, it is a terrible waste of money that will increase the risk of accidents, cause extended traffic delays, destroy one of the most scenic entrances to the Lake, and expend money that could be better used for other projects.

The following points should be emphasized:

1. Accident Risk: There have been no accidents precipitated by falling rocks. NDOT tells us, though, that such an accident might happen in the future. We have had, however, several accidents involving bikes hit by cars and trucks in the very short tunnels that now exist. Extending the westbound tunnel by 60 feet will greatly increase the risk of accidents for bicyclists. NDOT is increasing the risk for known dangers while ostensibly reducing the risk for unknown dangers.

Why does NDOT focus only on the northern end of the westbound tunnel? Do they expect that rocks will only fall on that one segments of road? Why not the other three entrances/exits? Do they plan to extend the tunnel at all four openings?

The community should also note that a tree fell across Highway 50 by the Zephyr Cove firehouse just a while back. Would NDOT want to construct a canopy or tunnel to guard against future tree falls? What distinction merits a tunnel for falling

rocks?

Finally, NDOT views the steel nets that protect motorists from falling rocks as “temporary”. What is the basis for that designation? Why not keep the steel nets in place and forego the tunnel?

2. Aesthetic Destruction: The northern entrance to the westbound tunnel offers motorists the first lake-level view of the lake. It is a stunning view. The proposed tunnel will obliterate that view entirely. For TRPA to endorse the destruction of that view is the ultimate bureaucratic hypocrisy.

3. Traffic Delays: NDOT itself projects interminable delays that will cripple traffic this summer and well into the end of the year (if not further). With the lake economy just now recovering, it is a terrible time to make the journey to the lake more difficult for visitors, especially those who fly into Reno.

4. Cost-Benefit Analysis: NDOT hasn't provided any meaningful cost data and absolutely no information that would facilitate a careful benefit-cost calculation. Given the tiny probability of a future rock/vehicle accident (especially with steel nets in place) and the high costs of construction, environmental destruction, and traffic delays, it seems impossible that this project could withstand an objective cost-benefit analysis.

In view of the foregoing points, the Tahoe community should vigorously oppose NDOT's proposed tunnel extension. To do so, the community should petition our congressman, our governor, and interested agencies to put a halt to this project .

Brad Schiller, Cave Rock