

Loop road question to be put before voters

By Kathryn Reed

Voters on the California side of the South Shore have yet another decision to make in November – an initiative regarding the loop road.

The measure brought forward by a group of locals has the requisite number of signatures to place on the ballot. At the July 19 South Lake Tahoe City Council meeting the electeds can enact what the petitioners want or put it on the ballot. The latter is the likely course of action based on stances and comments they've made in the past.

“This particular initiative is saying the city of South Lake Tahoe shall not approve or support the realignment of Highway 50, commonly known as the loop road, unless it gets the support of voters for a specific proposal,” Bruce Grego told *Lake Tahoe News*. He is one of the main backers of the proposal and has long been an opponent of the loop road. “This particular initiative provides a choice ... that the city cannot approve a realignment without voters' approval.”

A simple 50 percent majority is needed for it to pass.

“If this passes, then the city will have to put on a future ballot a specific realignment,” Grego said.

The Tahoe Transportation District, which is the lead agency for the project, is in the process of developing environmental documents. From those a preferred alternative will come forth. It is that alternative that voters would weigh in on via a second ballot measure down the road – assuming the first ballot measure passes.

City Attorney Tom Watson told *Lake Tahoe News*, “Even if the vote is overwhelmingly against the project, the city can’t do anything to prevent it because it is not the city’s project. The City Council doesn’t have any decision-making that impacts that project.”

TTD does not have condemnation power, though. If eminent domain were needed to acquire property, the city or Caltrans would have to invoke it. The city today has a policy not to use eminent domain. That can be reversed if four out of the five electeds choose to do so.

If the measure passes, there is talk that a lawsuit would be filed challenging the legality of it. It’s not possible to challenge it prior to the vote.

El Dorado County Elections Department could not tell *Lake Tahoe News* what it will cost the city to place the measure on the ballot.

Also on the Nov. 8 ballot will be two tax measures the city wants voters to approve. One would raise the hotel tax and the other the sales tax. Raising the current TOT by 2 percent is projected to generate \$2 million annually. Upping the sales tax by one-half percent to 8.25 percent would likely bring in \$2.5 million each year.

The current transient occupancy tax is 10 percent throughout much of South Lake Tahoe, 12 percent in the redevelopment area. The former goes into the city’s General Fund, the latter mostly to pay off the bond debt. The Tourism Improvement District, which was formed in 2006, tacks on another \$3.50 or \$4 per night. TID uses that money for marketing.

South Shore residents will also be voting on:

- City Council (two seats)
- Lake Tahoe Community College (two seats)

- Lake Tahoe Unified School District (three)
- South Tahoe Public Utility District (two)
- Lake Valley Fire Protection District (three).

The filing period is July 18-Aug. 12. If an incumbent does not file, the deadline is extended to Aug. 17.