

Safety driving Meyers roundabout, Echo bridge

By Kathryn Reed

By the end of the 2020 construction season motorists should be driving over a new bridge near the top of Echo Summit and through a roundabout in Meyers.

Caltrans on Thursday night spent a couple hours telling the more than 30 people at an informational meeting about the two projects.

The bridge is needed to replace the one built in 1939. It's located 7 miles west of South Lake Tahoe. It is crumbling, rebar is showing, steel is rusting and structurally it is unsound.

Today it has three spans; in the future it will be one. Travel lanes will go from 11-feet to 12-feet wide.



Clark Peri, Caltrans project manager, talks Oct. 20 about the Echo Summit bridge project. Photo/LTN

Three alternatives plus a no build are being studied, with comments on the environmental documents being taken until Nov. 3 (Details are **online**.)

The cost ranges from \$6.5 million to \$8.2 million.

What concerned some in attendance is that with all of the alternatives the highway would have to be closed for at least 10 consecutive days. Johnson Pass Road will be accessible with a permit, otherwise most people will be getting to western destinations going Highway 89 to Highway 88. At other times there will be one-way control.

In 2011, the highway over Echo Summit was closed for the retaining wall replacement. A Caltrans official on Oct. 20 said during that time it's estimated the South Shore lost \$1 million a day. With tourism rebounding, the economic impact could be even greater this time.

The bridge project is expected to take place in 2019 and 2020.

Public outreach will be part of the protocols.

Alternative 2 calls for a little wider roadway so a bike route could be added. Alternative 3 would have the cast done onsite.

Caltrans looked at repairing the bridge instead of replacing it. It was determined this would cost more money, and with the possibility of unknown issues arising, this could add to the expense and time to complete the project.

A geological study still needs to be completed.

One attendee asked whether building a tunnel had been study; it wasn't.

During the first year of bridge construction Caltrans intends to build a roundabout at the intersection of highways 50 and 89 in Meyers. This discussion was the most heated, with many people flummoxed that it is already a done deal.

Caltrans said the 21 accidents, eight of which involved injuries, between 2007-12 triggered a safety study. A roundabout was determined to be better than adding stop signs or a signal.

What worries Brad Zlendick, battalion chief with Lake Valley Fire Protection District, is being able to get up Echo Summit, particularly in winter. Instead of going through the roundabout, it will be more expeditious to head into oncoming traffic even though this is more dangerous. He and Caltrans officials agreed to talk more.

The 135-diameter roundabout will be a single lane of traffic. What will be a bit unique is there will be a passing lane of sorts going west.

Pedestrian and cyclist crossings will be incorporated into the design.

On the original maps the legacy tree deemed worthy of protection during the Meyers Area Plan meetings was slated for removal. That is no longer the case. The large Jeffery pine on the southeast corner will not be harmed.

Tom Brannon, deputy director of the local Caltrans district, admitted the backups during peak times are not going to be alleviated with the roundabout. This particular roundabout is for safety, not traffic flow.