

Opinion: Tahoe needs to focus on transportation

By Joanne Marchetta

By now, most people have heard: Federal courts upheld the 2012 Regional Plan for Lake Tahoe, affirming the blueprint that maintains development caps and strengthens environmental protections while encouraging community revitalization, redevelopment, and updated infrastructure.

Capturing the most attention these days is the traffic in our small communities from millions of people who drive up to enjoy our lake. And the transportation system is where TRPA is giving more focused attention to benefit Tahoe's environment, economy, and quality of life.



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TRPA is working on its transportation plan, Linking Tahoe, as an essential foundation to maintain Tahoe's quality of life. We have reached out to residents, visitors, and government partners, and heard from all of them that Tahoe's transportation system needs major improvements.

Recent project approvals just outside the Tahoe basin have heightened public scrutiny of the region's transportation shortcomings. During peak times, roadways are clogged, parking areas are full, there's a shortage of places to charge

electric vehicles, and transit service is limited.

And that's not the whole of it. Population growth in Reno, Sacramento, and the Bay Area means tens of thousands more people will be traveling to our region to enjoy the lake and mountains on any given day in years to come. Finding ways to better handle this visitation is a reality that needs to be addressed.

As these metro areas grow, we cannot simply build a wall to keep people out or build bigger roads to accommodate more traffic. We need a mix of solutions: targeted road and parking projects, transit services and transit priority lanes, bike and pedestrian routes, better technology, and creative strategies to manage traffic volumes. We need to make it easier and more rewarding for people to get to, from, and around the Tahoe basin without having to get in a car at all.

The biggest question is how to pay for these improvements. November election results on transportation funding measures give us a better sense of what the public is willing to support.

All around California, voters both supported and rejected sales tax and bond measures to pay for transportation projects. In the Bay Area, voters overwhelmingly passed ballot measures to raise billions of dollars in funding for roads, trails, affordable housing, and transit where they live and work.

Nationwide, voters passed 34 of 49 local and statewide ballot measures for transit funding, measures that will raise nearly \$200 billion for their home districts. This was the largest number of ballot measures and the largest collective amounts for transit funding in an election in the country's history, according to the American Public Transportation Association.

More counties are working on their own sales taxes and other measures to pay for transportation. That's because state and

federal fuel taxes are not raising enough money to pay for the transportation repairs and upgrades communities want and need.

With limited exceptions, funding successes in our visitors' metropolitan home districts were not matched here at Lake Tahoe this election. Yet we know there is widespread support for building bike and pedestrian trails that serve our communities by linking neighborhoods and tourist lodging to schools, jobs, shopping centers, and recreation areas. Tahoe has made tremendous progress on this front, building 150 miles of bike and pedestrian routes over the last 20 years. But the bigger game changers for the transportation system will require much more. We know many residents and visitors want more transit routes and more frequent service. When providers offer free and more frequent service, people use it.

Transportation projects are one of the best ways to achieve our many goals for Tahoe. They can enhance recreation opportunities, revitalize communities, reduce stormwater pollution, and get people out of cars to reduce emissions. Going forward, the hard question is how we'll pay for these transportation improvements.

Recent changes to federal transportation laws recognize the heavy visitation to Lake Tahoe and we expect to see more federal funding. This new funding will help, but it will not be enough. We must have a broad discussion on this important question, involving all our partners and communities in the Tahoe Basin. TRPA is reaching out to partners in neighboring metro areas to involve them as well.

What transportation costs should be paid by residents, businesses, second-home owners, or the millions of people who drive up to Lake Tahoe? What share should be paid by gasoline taxes, sales taxes, or other innovative funding measures? The answers to these questions are not yet clear at Tahoe. But the discussion is necessary and the need is urgent. As with all success at Tahoe, like that of the 2012 Regional Plan, by

working together and bringing forward our best ideas, we can find solutions. And our communities and our lake will be all the healthier for it.

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