

Opinion: Collaboration will solve region's traffic problems

By Andy Wirth

As locals, short- or long-time residents, or frequent visitors of North Lake Tahoe, we all know and have likely experienced firsthand that traffic and transportation throughout our region can be challenging. In fact, it's not new, but rather a decades-old problem, as "the original local" Eric Poulsen, has pointed out to me a few times. Ironically, traffic experts have extensive modeling which suggests that the traffic congestion nowadays has actually eased since the early 2000s. I take no solace in that fact; our circumstance relative to traffic and roads congestion as a region is simply unacceptable.



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From the 1940s to today, there hasn't been a broad, material and credible set of solutions implemented by community leaders (civic entities "do" infrastructure) that has worked well to resolve or event mitigate this regional challenge. For me (albeit still being somewhat new to the region), there seems to be a fierce and unfathomable commitment to the status quo. Despite a great many acronymed agencies analyzing the challenges in our region, improvements have been slow at best and to the general public, it understandably appears that

nothing actually gets done.

Part of the reason for that is that as a community, we simply haven't worked together to remedy these decades old transit and infrastructure challenges. There have been disjointed efforts by various entities, and insular approach by civic entities, and it undoubtedly has felt like a daunting task that only gets more challenging. Moreover, the base population of the primary cities that are the basis to demand here in Lake Tahoe, increases year after year bringing more visitors to our region, summer and winter, and seemingly compounding the problem.

The good news is that many of us aren't willing to throw in the towel on this one. In fact, my company and I are hell bent on developing and implementing a variety of solutions related to resolving road congestion and regional transportation. Key point here: The basis to the demand which creates traffic and roads congestion has many discreet layers and sources. In order to be impactful, the solutions have to address each discreet type and source of demand.

Regardless of season, much of our community relies on some type of tourism-related visitation. Mass transit and even "micro mass transit" and other traffic congestion alleviating solutions have and are being implemented, and the light at the end of the tunnel is getting brighter. As a region, we experienced success with these collective efforts during the recent FIS World Cup event that took place at Squaw Valley.

Collectively, our community demonstrated that it is possible to make every weekend like what we experienced during World Cup. Despite there being more than 20,000 people in town for this international event, transportation was efficient, and traffic delays throughout the region – specifically on Highway 89 kept to a minimum over that weekend.

How and why did it work?

Quite simply, there was a communitywide rallying cry around Alpine World Cup, followed by extensive cooperation and collaboration by multiple entities throughout our region, as well as substantial use of the transportation services offered by both residents and visitors. Thankfully, the insular aspect of the civic entities and agencies was suspended. Local media helped to spread the word about transportation options, highway patrolmen helped to direct traffic, satellite parking locations were used both in Truckee and Tahoe City, free shuttles were offered frequently throughout the day (and used!), people carpoled if they did decide to drive to Squaw Valley to watch the event, and free transportation provided by Chariot within the resort was utilized by residents and guests staying in Squaw Valley.

What we experienced as a region is that implementation of these effective solutions has a positive impact on regional transportation and traffic. It was evident that mass transportation solutions can and do work. With community support and participation, the tactics employed during World Cup are things that can be replicated region-wide on peak days in the future.

The reality is that each and every one of us has the ability to improve the situation – we just need to continue to work together to affect change. Let's let go of the attraction to an old way of "doing business" amongst the various entities in our region, and what seems to be a bizarre and absurd attachment to stasis. As my friend, Joanne Marchetta with the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency and I agreed this past summer, we may be the last mountain community to figure this out. We know what success looks like by way of other mountain communities that figured this out a decade or two ago. We also know what success looks like here in this very community. The Alpine World Cup demonstrated what we're capable of ... the success of true collaboration.

In the future, with continued communitywide collaboration,

there's no reason why all the easily forecasted "busy" weekends can't all be like Alpine World Cup.

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