

Opinion: TRPA misses the mark with transportation

By Jeffrey Spencer

In TRPA's latest publication *Tahoe In Depth* there is an article about their latest plan for transportation. The article outlines transit improvements, trails and technology. What is interesting to me is their thinking is reactionary rather than visionary; 19th century thinking for 21st century problems.

We all have experienced the gridlock caused by tourists following alternative routes provided by Waze and Google Maps to try and divert around closures and delays. Our local streets have become impassible during peak travel on weekends and holidays. We residents cannot conduct our lives during these times. Simple tasks such as getting groceries or going to church are nearly impossible. God forbid an emergency happens.

I have been working in planning, and especially the transportation sector for over 20 years. My focus has been in implementing technology to address mobility across California and in transit across the U.S. In order to address growing concern about local issues such as peak congestion and localized traffic, I have been suggesting technology improvements for traveler information and demand management to TRPA since 2013, without any success.

A meeting was held in February at the Meyers center, with the county supervisor addressing the issue supported by a host of officials from planning, the sheriff's office and CHP. I proposed a solution using current technology that can be easily deployed. I also spoke about the impacts and costs, and how we can recover those costs to improve our roads. Everyone

seemed to agree this was a logical approach. Sue Novasel stated she would put me in touch with TDD about that proposal, but not a thing has happened yet.

According to TRPA's plan, they now seem to think that providing transit around the basin will get visitors out of their cars and lessen congestion. The national average of transit mode share is 2 percent, and less in rural communities. Rural transit tends to most serve those dependent on transit, such as workers without cars and elderly dependent for work, medical, shopping, etc. When was the last time you drove to visit somewhere and then rode the bus? I can just see the masses loading the bus with their mountain bikes, kayaks, SUPs, coolers and grills to enjoy the many recreational opportunities Tahoe offers. Right! According to studies performed here, the likely riders were casino patrons and elderly.

The bus service is dismal. Folks that are truly dependent on bus service cannot get to work on time nor home if they work after 7pm. Folks in Meyers have no bus service at all. Kids that don't drive can't get into town unless a parent drives them. The response to that problem is "it isn't cost effective." One highlight proposed in their plan is free bus service. That plan is supposed to be cost effective? Like any other commodity, we have a simple economics problem between supply and demand.

Look at the recent "improvements" done at Camp Richardson. The pedestrian crossing is clearly marked and signalized, but the signal cycles about every 15 seconds so folks can get to their ice cream and coffee. Meanwhile, traffic is backed up nearly two miles to 15th Street and hundreds of cars wait endlessly to pass, meanwhile spewing their emissions while idling in the gridlock.

At issue here is the TRPA and county have their own solutions looking for a problem without a lick of common sense. There is

so much focus on how to collect taxes through growing business and tourism, but nothing on how to truly mitigate the impacts of attracting all these tourists, addressing the conditions of our roads, or improving the quality of life for residents. Building a tourist-focused bus service that bangs and bounces along on the plethora of potholes is not going to be attractive to anyone. A purely tourist-focused economy only builds low-paying service jobs and ignores the needs of residents.

We collect gas taxes based on our population, but that population swells to more than four times on weekends and holidays. The tourists are not paying for their impacts to our system. We need a comprehensive plan that looks at all modes, including the future of shared-mobility and automation. We need a plan that monetizes the commodity of mobility in the basin and either reduces or offsets the impact to our roads. We need fair and equitable solutions and not expect to balance the road and transit budget solely on the backs of the local taxpayer.

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