

Carson bypass opens to human-powered transport



Swarms of people on July 22 break in the 1-580 connector in Carson City. Photo/Susan Wood

By Susan Wood

CARSON CITY – Americans love the open road.

That sentiment is not reserved to travel on four wheels – as evidenced July 22 in Nevada’s capital city to commemorate the completion of the last leg of the Interstate 580 Carson City Freeway.

Travelers of all sorts and all ages took the invitation from the Nevada Department of Transportation on Saturday morning to zoom up and down the 2-plus mile stretch between the Highway 50-Spooner Junction and Fairview Avenue.

With a majority from Carson City, more than 1,000 people

showed up on road, mountain, cruiser, BMX and vintage bikes, accompanying walkers, runners, skateboarders, Rollerbladers, roller skaters as well as pedestrians with baby carriages and scooters. Drones and Ultralights even flew overhead.



Artwork is part of the freeway, with the eagle to be near the Spooner intersection.
Photo/Susan Wood

Many locals expressed relief and exhilaration that the day had come, considering the long, hard-fought process. The freeway is expected to open in early August, according NDOT – which celebrated its **centennial last March**.

The interstate completion allows one to drive from the south side of Carson City to the San Francisco Bay Bridge without a stoplight. This means going to Reno first.

Doing so was no easy task over the last few decades. The \$42 million project – which includes an accompanying trail and décor – underwent at least seven contracts to accommodate the funding stream that included additional sales tax. The

construction that started in June 2015 required 1 million cubic yards of earth excavated, 97,000 tons of asphalt paving and 950,000 pounds of reinforcing steel installed.

“We’ve waited a long time for this,” Carson City Mayor Robert Crowell said, recalling the milestones of progress amid the challenges.



Cyclists would love for this smooth pavement to be the norm everywhere. Photo/Susan Wood

He remembered the late Nevada Gov. Kenny Guinn driving a black Cadillac over the first freeway section from the north end of town to Fairview Avenue in 2006. With overpass crossings at Koontz, Snyder and Clearview, the new leg links Fairview with the Highway 50 connection to South Lake Tahoe.

“I-580 allows us to showcase the state Capitol that will be the envy of all,” Crowell told the cheering crowd.

He acknowledged the tough road in getting to the day of opening given criticism the bypass would “kill downtown” – as

declared by his own father. The mayor also tipped his hat to nearby businesses enduring dust.

“This is a turning point we must embrace with vigor,” Crowell said.

For one person in particular, the morning was an emotional one.

“My heart beats a little faster thinking about this,” the mayor said.

The freeway was dedicated to the late Carson City Sheriff’s Deputy Carl Howell, who was shot and killed in August 2015 on a domestic battery call on the east side of town.

“The family doesn’t have enough words to explain the wonderment about this. The honor and accolades are over the top,” his father Kevin Howell said, while wearing his son’s badge No. 5466. “I never stop thinking about him.”

Now he’ll be reminded of the community’s gratitude when he drives the freeway around town.



Kevin Howell with his son, Carl’s, badge. The freeway honors the fallen sheriff’s

deputy. Photo/Susan Wood

Once it opens, NDOT estimates 43,000 vehicles daily will use the section of freeway by 2035.

But on Saturday it was all about human power – in its many forms.

“It’s nice to have this crowd. Look at all these cyclists,” Alta Alpina Bike Club member Michael Bayer said, while visiting with friends under the overpass. The freeway turned into a giant social hour.

Mayer guessed that over half of the bike club’s 200 members came out to support the free event.

The avid cyclist contends the public only needs a nudge such as this to get them to see the beauty and benefits of using a bicycle as a means of transit.



The removal of the “freeway ends” sign will happen in August.
Photo/Susan Wood

A Carson City retail worker on roller skates had another idea.

“I’m doing shameless self-promotion,” Danielle Friend said.

She used the opportunity to hand out fliers highlighting Eyemart, a new business on the south side of town.

Like so many others who covered the short stretch, Friend was geared up for a workout that morning.

A workout is what Carl and Leanne Heard were going for too. The doctor-nurse duo, who work at Carson Tahoe Hospital, decided he would place a bungee cord between them. He was on Rollerblades and she tugged him on her mountain bike.

“I’ve said he almost brought a whip,” she said, laughing.

And with that, the couple took off.

William Frederick admitted to having his hands full trying to round up his 4-year-old son, James, who ran into the mayor on his bicycle.

“This is great. I never thought it was going to be,” Frederick said, calling the event an historic milestone experience for Carson City.

Gardnerville resident Scott Doerr agreed, while taking a break on his vintage New Belgium bicycle with a basket up front. He appeared content leisurely sauntering up the road on his Fat Tire bike.



All ages enjoy the rare opportunity to be on the freeway before it opens to cars. Photo/Susan Wood

Skateboarders Robbie Rupp and Devon Fulmer were a little more

serious about the endeavor, sizzling in 80-plus degree heat on the smooth asphalt at about 20 mph.

The members of the Wheelhouse Club had been looking forward to the event to ride their skateboards where no vehicle dares to go just yet. Apparently, they're not alone. Fulmer, who works at the Wheelhouse skateboard shop, said he knew of an Arizona woman who flew into town with her bicycle to ride the new freeway section.

Nevada Highway Patrol officers Greg Moore and Erik Lee turned their Saturday duty into a community event. Some attendees saw the opportunity to look into hitching a ride with a cop.

"Everybody asks," Lee said, while standing next to his shiny, fully-equipped motorcycle. Ironically, the officers were out there to keep an eye on the traffic with its varying speeds people were traveling. They were tasked with rounding up the public at 11:45am.

No traffic is allowed on the road until it officially opens to vehicles.