

# Opinion: More bike trails are good for Tahoe

By Ty Polastri

Bike paths can transform a community to be safer, healthier, and contribute to its economic and environmental sustainability. A bike path, or more accurately called a shared-use trail, is a “completely separated right-of-way for the exclusive use of bicyclists and pedestrians with cross-flow from vehicles minimized.”



Ty Polastri

The Tahoe Regional Planning Agency reports that the Lake Tahoe Basin has 49.85 miles of shared-use paths with Dollar Creek (2.2 miles), Sand Harbor to Incline Village (3 miles), Ski Run Boulevard to El Dorado Beach (just under 1 mile), and Incline Way in Washoe County (0.3ish miles) currently under construction. Looking ahead, the regional plan calls for another 25.71 miles over the next five years.

Here are some projects that are in the planning process without specific start dates:

- Highways 89/50 in Meyers. Roundabout implementation start 2018, completion 2021. This includes adding to the path network. Not sure on miles of path.
- Sierra Boulevard in South Lake Tahoe may be in construction, not positive though. I know it's their plan, but these things get moved out; 0.6 miles of path.
- Tahoe Valley Greenbelt in CSLT. Same as above. Supposed

to start next year. Roughly 1.6 miles of path.

Al Tahoe Safety and Mobility Enhancement Project. May start next year, but most likely 2019 start date. 1.9 miles.

- Meeks Bay to Sugar Pine Point (may start this year, but most likely next year). Just under 1 mile.

Numerous reports and studies have carefully documented bike path benefits to include a community's livability to the local economy. Bike paths can be associated with higher property value when a trail provides easy access to schools, shopping districts and recreational resources from neighborhoods. When a trail offers convenient neighborhood opportunities for physical activity and safe alternatives to using an automobile, property value increases because of the added lifestyle value, and local governments receive more property tax revenue.

Retail businesses also benefit from increased sales. A recent site visit to Long Beach and Davis saw auto parking spaces converted into "bike corrals" – a dedicated parking space for bikes only. A bike corral of just one converted auto parking space can accommodate 12 bicycles as opposed to one vehicle. Retailers with bike corrals in front of their businesses experienced an increase in business and a cultural shift of the type of customer – a customer who spent more time and dollars at their business.

Environmental benefits are also present when bicycling is an alternative transportation mode. Bike path use contributes to air quality improvements with the reduction of nitrogen oxides, particulate matter, hydrocarbons, and greenhouse gas emissions from motor vehicles. Lake Tahoe water quality suffers from automobile use. Gas emissions fall from the sky and enter the Lake stimulating algae growth. Air borne particulates released into the atmosphere, from vehicles pulverizing road debris, also fall into the lake increasing cloudiness and water temperature – stimulating more algae

growth.

According to the Center for Disease Control, 36.5 percent of the U.S. adults and 17 percent of youth are obese. Obesity is a chronic health problem and one of the biggest factors for cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes and certain types of cancer – many that are otherwise preventable. Neighborhood bike paths can provide a convenient way to help develop a fit active lifestyle and reduce obese associated health costs, over \$150 billion annually, on society and the employers.

In the United States 50 percent of all auto trips taken are three miles or less and yet most Americans drive to even the closes destinations. Only 3 percent of commuting trips in the U.S. are by bicycle, compared to up to 60 percent in The Netherlands.

Here in Tahoe most bike paths either pass through or are adjacent to high concentrations of residential areas, commercial lodging properties, schools and shopping areas. It is just 5 miles from Stateline to the Y, with nearly flat terrain the entire distance. It is also true in Tahoe City and Incline Village, making biking to work, school or for play from home or lodging highly feasible and beneficial to the “triple bottom line” (environment, economy and community).

Helping mitigate some of these health and environmental impacts is a campaign lead by Bike Tahoe in collaboration with the Nevada Commission on Tourism. It is a campaign encouraging more bicycle use among residents, businesses and visitors. One of the campaign’s key elements is a series of bicycling videos freely available for use by any business, agency, and organization or public. The **most recent video** available for downloading and sharing. It highlights some of the most popular bike paths traveling through the residential and commercial corridors of South Lake Tahoe and Tahoe City, and Genoa.

*Ty Polastri is president of Bike Tahoe.*