

EDC works to curtail Tahoe residential traffic jams

By Kathryn Reed

Starting Sunday El Dorado County will be implementing a traffic diversion strategy with the goal of keeping non-residents on main streets as they head home instead of clogging the side roads.

About 70 people turned out for the Feb. 28 meeting in Meyers hosted by various officials from the county. Transportation, law enforcement and legal staff, along with Supervisor Sue Novasel were on hand to listen to concerns and explain what the future holds.

“We are trying to influence driving patterns,” Rafael Martinez, El Dorado County transportation director, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Barriers will be placed on Lake Tahoe Boulevard at Sawmill Road with signs on them directing people to turn so they end up back on Highway 50. This is to keep them out of the North Upper Truckee neighborhood.

People like to take the route through the neighborhood because it comes out west of the chain inspection and can be faster.

The problem, though, is those without chains or four-wheel drive are spinning out. Accidents are the norm. Add the increase in vehicles and at times it's like a parking lot with locals unable to get to where they need to go in a reasonable amount of time.

Martinez says the situation has gotten worse because more people are coming to the Tahoe basin and the advent of phone apps directing motorists around the highway congestion.

He said the county has tried to work with the app developers, but have gotten nowhere. Their stance is that it's a public road so the public has a right to use it.

The barricade/sign approach is considered a pilot program. The plastic looking devices that are actually made out of wood and metal will be erected starting March 4 at 9am, and will remain up for about 24 hours. They will be out every Sunday for the rest of the winter season, and then on the Monday of Memorial Day weekend.

Between feedback from residents and staff that regularly works those hours (like snowplow drivers), the county will assess if the barricades are working, if something needs to be tweaked or if the program is scrapped.

Summer also brings the unwanted congestion to residential areas, so if this works, the county could continue it. There is also the possibility of trying something similar on Pioneer Trail because visitors are taking side streets there as well with often unpleasant outcomes for all involved.

Martinez said in other places he's worked this method of influencing traffic has reduced the problem by 60 percent.

There isn't anything to stop people from going around the barricade. This is good for locals needing to come and go. But it also means other drivers could do the same. Still, Martinez is confident this will improve the current situation.

Just closing roads is not an option because they are public streets.