

# Opinion: Loop Road issues need addressing

**Publisher's note:** *This letter was sent to the South Lake Tahoe City Council and Lake Tahoe News.*

**City Council,**

The bypass loop road project preferred alternative will be out any day now. We all know what that decision will be. It is obviously awkward to have one of your members suing you regarding Measure T. While the judge did rule in their favor, that was done without the proponents even being able to be in the discussion to present an argument of any kind and your former attorney unfortunately did not defend the citizens but rather evidently rolled over. It seemed that ex parte may have actually occurred.



Duane Wallace

That was then. This is now. We believe the advice you were given was not appropriate. Your simply changing the language in consultation with your co defendants/ us might have worked. And it still may work. We are after all co-defendants not adversaries and your role is to defend your citizens not to side with unknown financiers of an expensive lawsuit against your citizens. That has seemed be lost in the mix.

The proponents have made it seem like birds are going to sing and the sun will shine brighter with pedestrians walking hand

in hand if we will only allow this one mile, \$100 million freeway project to go through one of our neighborhoods. We see only dark clouds ahead. The fact still remains that 60 percent of your voters want a say in the decision regarding the project. It appears that percentage although very high has grown ever larger. The question is, how high does it have to be for the council to accept it as being valid? I have heard some council members say that oh well the voters don't really know what they want so the council needs to decide all issues. We elected people sure think the voters knew what they were doing when they elected us. I know I do when I'm elected. But that doesn't mean we should stop listening but rather quite the contrary. And it is in our state Constitution that the voters have the ability and right to make state, county and city decisions especially when it comes to taxes. (Judges are actually instructed to give great deference to the voters intent). It certainly needs to be explored whether the California side of the bypass will have to use tax funds to put up their share of the federal required match on the \$100 million. Where will that approximately \$5 million come from? The match is usually 20 percent which would actually mean our share is tens of million dollars. Unless it is a straight 100 percent grant, the feds always expect a 20 percent match. The Nevada side has already voted for a gas tax for their share. I asked the TTD representative, where will ours come from? He didn't know. Do you know where our California side share will come from?

Another of the arguments against the initiative was that the city will not have a say in the matter so its unnecessary for the citizens to have to vote. I have attached the TTDs own words from their website (attached) regarding the City as a partner and the fact that you have a decision making say over the project. Please take the time to read that brief statement from their introduction of the project. Certainly changing zoning such as the housing element and densities will require Council votes as well as abandoning of right of ways

dedicating city streets and accepting a U.S. Highway through that mostly Hispanic neighborhood. Since we brought up the website we haven't been able to find that page again. Does that make it less true or just more inconvenient? As we have said before, it is basically taking a traffic problem between the casinos and moving into one of your citizens neighborhoods. In addition the Hispanic Caucus of the California State Legislature has been approached. They may not see it as just a neighborhood especially since this could not happen in any other neighborhood in our City.

Scores of citizens have complained about the loss of all those almost 100 houses. So then the TTD started calling it another name, that being an affordable housing project. It turns out that there is not enough funding for that element from the federal dollars they seek. And there is very little or almost no interest from contractors who would rather build Chateau like projects or McMansions that have profit connected to them. Unfortunately, affordable housing is not affordable for those seeking to build them. While the TTD proclaims possibilities not one single company or contractor has stepped up to commit because no subsidies exist. Simply buying out homes and renters with vouchers or moving the families with up to 100 school children into places in Nevada like the old middle school will not replace the lost housing. Neither will buying homes on the California side and dedicating them. The loss of 100 will still be there. If the kids move into Nevada it will cost LTUSD about a half million dollars at about \$5,000 per pupil per year. Building a project in California might only replace what will be lost and detour us from finding actual additional housing that we so desperately need. In fact, even if the houses were replaced it would still only have us break even and not increase the number of homes we need. That is a zero sum game played out upon our poorest residents.

Another argument was that the B=ypass would relieve traffic

congestion. However, the Chateau project has made that an impossible claim to support. Caltrans couldn't make the numbers work. So now yet another name. It is now called a revitalization project. However, given that Nevada has a convention center waiting at the end of the bypass and the fact that a shopping center is also planned that will also be waiting at the end of the Bypass is problematic. It now becomes a Douglas County revitalization project. For example, when visitors use their GPS as so many now do they will be directed to take pioneer trail to a bypass road that effectively will reduce a large amount of traffic that will most likely move the cars/customers on Highway 50 over to a long line at the junction with Pioneer trail. It won't reduce traffic jams but rather move them. One has only to drive through downtown Carson City to see the empty stores and businesses for sale to envision our fate. Or they can drive down Highway 99 past the towns that were bypassed. All have suffered the same result.

The business being threatened do not see it as revitalization. We have gone in person to those merchants and restaurants. They tell us that they are scared and not in favor. The ones in the formerly Crescent V have indicated that they have been advised to stay out of the issue. They express concerns about what they have been told will be four years of traffic detours and road reconfigurations. They fear that they will not survive what seems to always take longer. They see that some property owners may have been promised first selection for relocation in order to stop them from being vocal. They also don't understand how diverting traffic around behind them before the cars even reach them can mean revitalization for them. That is especially true since not one single parking spot will be created. That coupled with the casinos now charging for parking will create constantly circling traffic that will not be a safe biking and walking paradise as described. Where will the revitalization come from if all our parking is already full?

The rest of us see a compilation of road projects that could truly ruin South Lake Tahoe's reputation for many years to come. First, we have the ongoing U.S. Highway 50 project through town that will be still happening. Then we have the Echo Summit bridge replacement that will send traffic over Emigrant Trail adding another hour to the drive with no retail, gas or safety services including cell service for the entire trip. Then there is the roundabout in Meyers that will greet them when they come down Luther pass. Then the traffic will be total chaos at the Bypass project. All of these may be happening at once. Then there will still be the usual Sunday backup from Meyers all the way back through town except worse because of the roundabout construction and the Echo Summit bridge added to that queue of outgoing traffic. Then we can add the ski Run project that will divert that traffic back onto the main Highway. Even if we are wrong by one or two projects it will still be more delays during summer than we have ever had. And what will that do to the already poor bus system as riders have to wait in the same traffic in their attempt to get people to their destinations such as work on time. How will that congestion make for a good experience for any mode of transportation?

It is a result the foregoing concerns and for the returning of a better relationship with 60 percent of your constituents that we ask you to allow the people who voted for you to also be given a vote on this Bypass project. Please direct your attorneys to find ways to support your citizens initiative against the outside Sacramento law firm and their mysteriously funded lawsuit that is keeping you from being in concert with the majority of your constituents.

Respectfully,

Duane Wallace