

Bus service on South Shore in state of flux

By Kathryn Reed

STATELINE – Public outcry is forcing the Tahoe Transportation District board of directors to take more time before deciding how to reconfigure public transit on the South Shore.

George Fink, who manages the bus system, painted a financially bleak picture for the board at the May 11 meeting. Part of the funding the agency receives from California is dependent on fare revenue. TTD isn't close to meeting those numbers.

In order to do so staff is proposing reducing hours, eliminating routes, and altering on-demand access. A 50 percent cut across the transit spectrum is being considered.

TTD is dealing with not having enough workers, an inefficient fleet, lack of funding and the inability to meet performance measures.

Fink explained two-thirds of the riders on Route 50 are paying a reduced fare, while half of those on Route 53 are not paying full fare. Fink said that is out of whack and not sustainable. He said it's time to reduce the number of discounts available.

The board on Friday agreed to raise the senior discount from age 60 to 65, with those ages 5-64 considered general public who will pay full price. The Emerald Bay shuttle prices are going from \$2 one way to \$4, with the discounted rate doubling to \$2.

Many who attended the Friday meeting spoke about how changing the on-demand service would detrimentally impact the lives of those who are dependent on the service and have no alternative to get where they need to go. Many who use the service can't

drive.

One person called the bus service a “stabilizer” and another said it is her son’s “life line.” Two people in the health care profession spoke of how patients rely on the service to get to appointments.

Taxis were said to be unreliable and for some cost-prohibitive.

TTD staff had recommended drastically cutting the service, which included no longer going to the Meyers area. The board delayed making any decision on changing accessibility.

“Until we know where the transit routes will be we can’t really apply changes to demand response areas,” Steve Teshara, chair of the TTD board, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

He said the compelling testimony and the possibility of partnering with others like Barton Health were reasons to not take action Friday.

As for changing the routes used by the masses, public comment was extended a month to July 13. Cutting service hours per day in half is being talked about. Potential changes include eliminating the ski shuttles. While those are well-used, they are subsidized by Heavenly Mountain Resort so riders don’t have to pay. What the ski resort might do in the future remains to be seen.

Board member Marsha Berkbigler, who represents Washoe County, said, “I’m concerned we are taking transit away from the people using it.”