

Tahoe transportation gurus keep trying to connect the lake

By Kathryn Reed

STATELINE – Ten ideas to provide year-round transportation linking the North and South shores have been whittled to three, with two involving ferry service and one a bus route.

Advocates believe a ferry on Lake Tahoe could provide 3,500 daily boardings, operate eight hours a day during the height of summer, take about 45 minutes with a layover of 15 minutes, and make 12 roundtrips a day.

Today, no consistent year-round public transit service exists between the North and South shores.



This ferry is what the Tahoe Transportation District shows on its website as a possible boat to ply the waters of Lake Tahoe.

Five community members showed up at a meeting Tuesday night on

the South Shore to hear what is going on with water transit on Tahoe. Another meeting is slated for tonight on the North Shore.

Lake Tahoe News asked officials if year-round public transit between the North and South shores is something they want or something the public is demanding.

Alfred Knotts, who is leading the project for the Tahoe Transportation District, said, "We have to show the feds there is public demand." That is because the feds are funding part of the study and are hoped to be a source of money for whatever alternative is picked.

The Federal Transit Administration has given TTD a \$500,000 grant that is paying for this study and the public relations associated with it.

A travel mode survey was conducted in October 2010 that is being used to gauge how locals and tourists move around the Lake Tahoe Basin. That survey revealed 17 percent of the 123,000 daily trips are made between the North and South shores.

The survey also says 81 percent of the daily trips are from full-time residents, while the remaining 19 percent are made by visitors.

It's mostly tourists who transportation officials believe would use the ferry service.

While buses are one component that will be studied, that aspect of the equation was not discussed at the Tuesday meeting.

Still to be studied is whether a ferry would produce more emissions than these people would spew in a land vehicle. After all, lake clarity is supposed to be the mantra of all entities in the basin.

What's proposed

Alternatives 1, 2 and 6 are what will be studied. Alternative 1 is direct ferry service between South Lake Tahoe and Tahoe City. Alternative 2 is ferry service between South Lake Tahoe, Tahoe City and Kings Beach. Alternative 6 is bus service between South Lake Tahoe and Kings Beach via the East Shore.

Matthew Taunton with HDR consultants in Phoenix, who is working with TTD on the proposals, said alternative No. 1 would be the cheapest ferry proposal because it only has two terminals.

But he also said at other meetings there is community support for Alternative 2 because it goes more places.

Boats being looked at cost about \$11 million, with an operating cost of at least \$1.2 million a year.

More analysis will be done on the three ideas to come up with a preferred alternative. After that, the environmental analysis begins on the preferred alternative.

Knotts said whatever idea is pursued will connect with land-based transportation. That includes TART on the North Shore and BlueGo on the South Shore, even though the latter has never had consistent routes and is not used by tourists.

How parking will work, or getting people to ferries remains to be figured out.

It's expected whatever system is proposed will need to be subsidized – possibly as a public-private venture.

"This would diversify and connect our markets in ways that do not exist," Knotts said.

Not a new idea

Water transit on Lake Tahoe is not new. It has been talked

about at least since 1987. And it has been tried several times. Nothing has stayed afloat for long.

In the early 1990s, Hornblower Cruises ran the Meteor. A Plexiglas cover made winter travel chilly between South Lake Tahoe and Tahoe City. The first trip with skiers was in January 2002.

Ironically, it was named after the historic logging steamer that sank in Lake Tahoe in 1940 after 65 years of service.

A 46-foot double-decker cabin was expected to be the solution in 2003 to transport people between the five marinas operated by Bob Hassett. Now he uses not much more than a dinghy to move people between the South Shore marinas he operates – Timber Cove, Camp Richardson and Lakeside. Hassett started that shuttle in 2002.

Last summer Hassett started a larger boat shuttle between Camp Rich and Meeks Bay.

A 2003 proposal by Caltrans that was adopted by the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency says, “Discussions of a water ferry option generally led to the conclusion that a bicycle water ferry is a unique and potentially viable option for bicycle recreation and transit, but that there are two distinct paths to its development: 1) in terms of bicycle transit, increased bicycle access on ferries and improved ferry stops/service should be part of the broader scope of improving waterborne transit throughout the Tahoe Basin and 2) in terms of a unique recreational activity, a bicycle-only ferry pilot project could be implemented and run by a local nonprofit or bicycle advocacy group.”

In 2005, \$8 million was approved by the feds for water transit on Lake Tahoe.

“That was an authorization and not an appropriation, meaning if we meet FTA’s criteria, we could be eligible for an

appropriation to fulfill what was authorized," Carl Hasty, TTD executive director, told *Lake Tahoe News* on March 6.

South Lake Tahoe's 2008 draft Sustainability Vision has a goal to "create regular/dependable waterborne transit for residents and visitors." That hasn't happened.

The Blue Warrior shuttle on the North Shore in summer 2010 didn't last long.

A consultant in November 2010 recommended water transit begin the following summer – but that didn't happen.

Tahoe Transportation District in December 2010 thought it could have some water service functioning this summer.

Fifteen months later, Knotts would not give a date when a ferry might ply the waters of Lake Tahoe.

Funding of this project is nowhere to be found at this time. The California water bond that keeps being taken off the table once was going to help fund waterborne transit at Lake Tahoe. It still could. But some people in this *Los Angeles Times* article, called that idea "pork".

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Info:

- Meeting – March 7 at 6pm at 221 Fairway, Tahoe City (the Tahoe City PUD office).
- Alternatives and the PowerPoint from the meetings are expected to be posted on TTD's website.