

Public offers ideas for loop road



Mike McKeen wants more to be done at the state line area than officials have proposed. Photo/Kathryn Reed

By Kathryn Reed

Whether people want a loop road around the Stateline casinos or not isn't the question. The questions are what do they want it to look like and where should the roads go?

This isn't to say realigning Highway 50 on the South Shore is a done deal. It isn't by a long shot. Environmental documents still need to be finalized, then reviewed, revised and a final version released. Then there is the conundrum of financing what will be a multimillion-dollar project.

Wednesday night was a chance for people to reacquaint

themselves with the project that is being spearheaded by the Tahoe Transportation District. What the agency was looking for is public comment that can be incorporated into the environmental documents as the four alternatives, plus do nothing are studied.

Mike McKeen, who owns the property where Naked Fish and Powder House are located, has taken that invite to offer suggestions a step further than most. He hired an architect to draw up plans for how the area could look.

This has a lot to do with some of the proposals calling for his buildings to be wiped out as well as the Bottle Shop, which is owned by Kathay Lovell.

"Businesses would thrive more with a whole new gateway," McKeen told *Lake Tahoe News*.

He had copies of his plan available for anyone who wanted them.

His ideas somewhat complement what has become known as the triangle plan. It has the loop road starting near the vacant lots along Highway 50 before Pioneer Trail.

But what is different is McKeen proposes abandoning the current highway from that point to essentially today's intersection of 50 and Pioneer Trail. The highway, which becomes the loop road behind Harrah's and MontBleu, continues as proposed. Pioneer Trail, though, through this stretch becomes more of a pedestrian arcade.

McKeen envisions tearing down his buildings and replacing them with something more contemporary that would hold up over time.

The Bottle Shop is also proposed for demolition and rebuild under his plan.

Lovell told *Lake Tahoe News*, "I do like (Mike's) thought process on this. I like the idea of a gateway. I really like

the whole idea of the traffic flow there.”

And she likes the idea of keeping businesses and making the area more attractive. What she hasn’t seen are the numbers to know how everything pencils out.

Where there are old hotels McKeen proposes building affordable housing so the people who are displaced could still live in the neighborhood. He also wants a community center and parking to go on the other side of Pioneer Trail from his buildings.

Carl Hasty, executive director of TTD, said this kind of public input is exactly what the agency is looking for.

New to the official drawings is a proposed cycle track that is similar to one in Sparks. It calls for narrowing the vehicle lane to accommodate a bike lane. This segment would then possibly eventually tie into the Stateline-to-Stateline trail, Linear Park and the Greenway.

Curtis Fong, who puts on two major cycling events on the South Shore, told *Lake Tahoe News* the proposed changes to 50 would not affect his events. He also likes anything that makes roads more bike friendly. What he worries about is the proposed roundabout at Lake Parkway.

“I’m always concerned as a cyclist about the traffic circulars, especially a double lane,” Fong told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Brenda Knox of Meyers embraces the roundabout, saying they make traffic flow better and can be visually appealing.

Some people said they were there to take all the ideas in and hadn’t made a decision on the loop road, while others said it is imperative the area make progressive changes that will bring a visual and economic vitality to the area.

More than 70 people attended the Nov. 12 open house at Lake Tahoe Resort Hotel.

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Notes:

- More about the proposals may be found online. This website also allows people to make comments.
- The environmental documents are expected to be released in the first quarter of 2015.
- Advocates are promoting the loop road so the casino corridor can be more pedestrian-bike friendly, with the bulk of traffic going to the east around the casino corridor.