

Tahoe making case for federal transit dollars

By Kathryn Reed

Tahoe Transportation District officials are in Washington, D.C., this week on a mission to convince lawmakers to pass the federal transportation bill that would bring money to the Lake Tahoe Basin.

The Trans-Sierra Transportation Plan and Coalition is a loose coalition of six California jurisdictions and five from Nevada that have an economic interest in a functioning regional transit system.

“We will have more of a benefit working together instead of competing against each other,” Carl Hasty, executive director of TTD, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

With state and federal highways surrounding the basin and being the conduits to enter and exit the basin, local officials want a bigger piece of the financial pie.

But the region has long been shortchanged on its share of funding because it is considered a rural area. And while the permanent population fits the rural description, what isn't part of the equation is the tourist population. With those added vehicles on the roads, it puts a strain on infrastructure that was not designed to sustain them. The local dollars plus what comes from the two states and feds are not enough to maintain the roads or create a transit system that functions for everyone.

The TTD board on Feb. 13 heard a presentation about the Trans-Sierra plan as well as an update on Lake Tahoe's Highway Corridors and Inter-Regional Long-Range Transit Plan.

The staff report said, "Given the physical and environmental constraints of Lake Tahoe and the region, increased investments in transit will be key for getting a growing number of visitors and workers to and from their destinations with less congestion and fewer environmental impacts. Improved bus service, light rail transit, bus rapid transit, water taxis and ferries, and services for our senior and disabled friends and neighbors are all part of the Trans-Sierra Transportation Plan."

It would take \$35 billion to do all of the projects the jurisdictions have on the books. Hasty said \$19 billion is realistic number for what could be funded. Included in that is the loop road on the South Shore and Fanny Bridge replacement in Tahoe City.

That sort of investment would increase the odds the region would be able to attract large events like the X Games or the Olympics. A coalition is still working on bringing the Winter Games to the area in 2026.

Information from staff said, "The wide open spaces and attractions of the Trans-Sierra Region straddle what has been dubbed the Northern California megapolitan, the fast growing urban area stretching from San Francisco, through Sacramento, to Reno. The Northern California megapolitan is home to some 15 million people today, and this number is expected to increase by an estimated 25-30 percent by the year 2035."

Hasty and Alfred Knotts, TTD planner, will be talking with folks in the administration as well as congressional staff about Lake Tahoe's needs.

"There is all kinds of talk going on in D.C. What there isn't talk about is any growth in the program," Hasty said.

The corridor concept is a layered approach to planning where transit, bike-pedestrian issues and roadways are all considered. It considers recreation, commuter, tourist and

public transportation. And in doing so it means engaging a slew of stakeholders to make it all work.

Highway 28 in Incline Village is the corridor that received the most attention and work to date. Each corridor is different and will need different things.

All of this will be incorporated into the update of the Regional Transportation Plan that is due in 2016. It must be updated every four years. But instead of TTD or the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency doing so in a silo, components of the plan that are already being worked on by other entities will be compiled into the document so it is a collaborative, comprehensive document without redundancy.