TTD considering operating BlueGo in house

By Kathryn Reed

INCLINE VILLAGE – The Tahoe Transportation District board might take over BlueGo, the South Shore bus service, instead of relying on a third party.

When George Fink with TTD last week told the board going this route would give "the board more control", board member Nancy McDermid, replied, "Been there, done that." She represents Douglas County.

Adam Spear, attorney for the district, said the board is already liable today, but he would look into the nuances to see if there would be more exposure with direct operation of the system.

The last time this happened the system declared bankruptcy, board members were personally drawn into the ensuing litigation, as were the agencies they represented, and hundreds of thousands of dollars were spent on attorneys. The TTD board members were also the now defunct **South Tahoe Area Transit Authority** board, which is the entity that declared bankruptcy and was drawn into court by MV Transit, which operated the bus system.

TTD's five-year contract with Keolis ends June 30, 2016. This firm has been responsible for operating BlueGo, including handling all labor and maintenance issues. TTD staff believes it could get more for its money by having operations and maintenance done in house.

"So much of the fleet is down. It's been a challenge in the last year," TTD Executive Director Carl Hasty told the board. "Accident rates tend to be more than they have been in the

past.”

Fink said contractors often have short-term views on maintenance, which can shorten the lifespan of vehicles.

“It comes down to, do we want to take on employees,” Fink said.

TTD is interviewing firms that handle human resource issues. That is the one area TTD is deficient in.

Will Garner, who represents Placer County on the TTD board and runs the TART bus service on the North Shore, cautioned how much time is spent on HR issues. And he added that with a bus service it is seven days a week, nearly around the clock.

Andrew Strain, Heavenly Mountain Resort’s rep on the board, is concerned about how things deteriorated in five years to the point to want to abandon the current type of operation and said it’s not good if staff is worried where money is going.

The staff report from the Nov. 13 meeting says, “Another problem is the difficulty in determining how funding is being spent or focused in the contract. The contractor’s compensation is normally a fixed fee. There is a limited ability to track contractor spending on maintenance, training, and employee performance. That makes it difficult to assess what value the contractor is actually providing for the money it is receiving.”

No actual numbers were provided in the report or by staff at the meeting in regards to where money might be spent differently if TTD took over operations. The current TTD transit budget is $5,465,200.

“As we prepare for action it would be good to see a solid financial plan,” Strain said. “We want to make sure we go in with our eyes wide open. We need to have information before we make a decision.”

It was agreed staff will put together a workshop in December where third parties not involved in the outcome would give input. It will be on the South Shore so people who actually use the transit system would have an easier time to voice their opinion compared to last week’s meeting that was in Incline Village.