

Hwy. 50 open in Nevada and California



Minor slides on Highway 50 didn't stop traffic early Feb. 10.
Photo Copyright 2017 Carolyn E. Wright

Update Feb. 15, 6:25am:

By Kathryn Reed

Highway 50 on the Nevada and California sides is open.

One lane of Highway 50 in each direction is open on the Nevada side, allowing traffic to flow between the South Shore and Carson City.

The Nevada route had been closed since Feb. 8 because SUV-sized boulders had fallen onto the road and others were resting precariously on the hillside.

According to the Nevada Department of transportation, "Travel speeds are reduced to 35 mph. The traffic shifts are anticipated to be semi-permanent until a full-scale improvement project to stabilize and reinforce the roadside slope where the slides occurred is constructed."

Crews put two rows of concrete rail on the eastbound side in an attempt to be a barrier if more rocks come cascading down.

While this current road closure in California has been an inconvenience, it is nothing compared to 1982 and 1997. In 1982, Highway 50 was closed for 75 days and was off-limits for 27 days in 1997.

"We are working on the cleanup. Most areas are buttoned up," Bob Ericksen, Caltrans engineer, told *Lake Tahoe News* on Tuesday afternoon. The road opened late Tuesday night.

The highway had been closed since Friday when several sizable slides crossed all lanes of traffic. Most have been in the Whitehall, Kyburz areas. The most problematic one involves sand coming down from the hillside.

"It's basically a giant sand dune in the mountains," Ericksen said. It has been pushed back as far as possible and stabilized to the point crews believe it's safe for traffic to resume.

The sand kept coming down as crews were clearing the area. Ericksen said 14,000 cubic yards of debris have been hauled away in the last few days. In 1997, 80,000 cubic yards were removed.

"Mud has reached the river, but not enough to cause any blockage. The water is running with such force there is very little possibility of blockage without a massive slide like what happened in 1982 and 1997," Ericksen said.

Sixty people had been working to clear the area, with work

occurring 24/7. It has involved five large excavators, four loaders, 25 semi-trucks, one paver, one grinder and other support equipment.

Ericksen, though, is concerned that another storm is just hours away.

"More rain is going to be a challenge up here. We are staging equipment up and down 50 in case we have more problems," Ericksen said.

NDOT is worried about the oncoming storm systems as well.

From the National Weather Service in Reno: "A series of weak to moderate storms is expected to impact the region beginning Thursday and potentially lasting through the middle of next week. Current projections don't indicate any strong storms. However, with very wet antecedent conditions in lower elevations and exceptionally deep snowpack at higher elevations, even small amounts of precipitation could create renewed flooding concerns."

The rain in the basin is supposed to start Wednesday night and turn to snow by Thursday night.

Road closures can happen at any time. It is important to check the respective state departments of transportation websites for current info, or click on the state icons on the home page of *Lake Tahoe News*, or call 511 in each state for road info.