

Traffic-clogging Camp Rich light goes dark



The lights at Camp Richardson on June 28 are all covered and inoperable. Photo/LTN

By Kathryn Reed

A tool designed to relieve congestion in Camp Richardson did just the opposite.

That red light at the corner of the ice cream shop and the road leading to the Beacon is now covered up.

Caltrans last October installed the light as a safety measure because so many pedestrians cross Highway 89 there but drivers often failed to stop. However, what the light did instead was create a worse traffic mess. On non-holiday periods and not even on weekends vehicles were backed up to 15th Street.

“It was allowing the pedestrians to control the traffic rather

than giving pedestrians a break,” South Lake Tahoe City Manager Nancy Kerry told *Lake Tahoe News*.

People would hit the button and the light would come on. There wasn’t a delay as there is on most crossing lights.

But that wasn’t the only problem.

“With no green people don’t go right away after the red goes off,” CHP Lt. Cmdr. Terry Lowther told *Lake Tahoe News*. So, while traffic had the right-of-way, they weren’t taking it.

The light only showed red, flashing red or nothing. People are programmed to not drive until they see green after a red light.



The light working on June 25 – a Monday afternoon – is perfect for pedestrians, horrible for drivers. Photo/LTN

Lowther said the light is programmable and that his agency is working with Caltrans to make it function for all involved. It’s not known if this new technology actually works for the volume of foot/bike and vehicle traffic this stretch of road handles this time of year.

The city, El Dorado County, California Highway Patrol, Caltrans and Tahoe Regional Planning Agency have feverishly been working on a solution. As of June 28, the lights are covered up and not operating.

"This is not the weekend to have experimental pedestrian traffic lights," Kerry said.

After the Fourth of July holiday a more permanent decision should be forthcoming.

A super long-term solution is the possibility of a more comprehensive plan to manage traffic in this area. That, though, would also involve the U.S. Forest Service because the feds own most of the land.

While TRPA, the Tahoe Transportation District and others keep on the broken record of wanting fewer cars everywhere in the basin, they don't provide any other means for people to get from point A to point B. Then on the flip side are the agencies trying to get more tourists to the area. It's a conundrum where divergent interests are in conflict, and the driving and walking public are ultimately caught in the middle.