

Transit agency working on short-term upgrades

By Kathryn Reed

Those who run the South Shore bus system and those who use it know it's a bumpy ride, at least figuratively.

No longer using the never understood BlueGo name, the Tahoe Transportation District is just calling the system by the government body's name. New buses have the TTD logo and color scheme. (Money isn't being spent to repaint the old buses.) Signs at the stops have a bus symbol for the first time. No longer do people have to guess what a BlueGo is.

Three additional hybrid buses will be operational later this month; two electric buses are coming in 2018.

Even though the system appears to be managed more professionally, operationally it is still far from ideal. Frequency – or lack of – is a constant complaint. Routes are another contentious topic.

TTD is addressing some of those concerns in the short range transit plan, the first such document it has created for the South Shore bus line. This bus service also stretches into Carson City because of funding from Nevada; it's a way to help commuters.

The document will be the subject of a discussion at the Sept. 8 TTD board of directors meeting. The five main objectives in it are: safety, workforce development, fleet expansion and replacement, facility capacity and modernization, and future service expansion. Many of these are interrelated, though not necessarily in an obvious way.



Tahoe Transportation District is working on little things – like logical signage.
Photo/LTN

The district hosted a public meeting last week, which was not well attended, that was intended to provide information about the plan. The document outlines goals for the next five years.

Funding is the main constraint when it comes to expanding routes and service. Expanding to Meyers and creating a hub at Lake Tahoe Community College are the first likely expansions. Seasonal routes are being worked on to get riders from the casino area to Emerald Bay.

“Without funding to support it, it does the community no good,” Tara Frank with TTD told *Lake Tahoe News* of why changes will not be immediate. The same goes for increasing frequency to every 15 or 30 minutes. Those ideas are not currently sustainable.

The district has a number of funding sources, from the federal and two state governments, to grants and private contributions. Vail Resorts is a significant contributor, but no longer do the casinos contribute a dime.

Safety will always be at the top of the list as a priority – for workers and riders. Complaints were received last winter

that buses weren't rolling on time. Nothing was. They don't have magic powers to get through unplowed streets and can only move with the flow of traffic.

Workforce development really means the district is having staffing issues. It's not alone. TART, the North Shore bus line, had to eliminate some of its winter routes because of a driver shortage.

"We have overtime because we can't find drivers," Frank said. "It's compounded because they can't find housing. It's hard to provide service with a thin crew."

This, then, becomes a safety issue as well.

As the fleet expands – a necessity if routes are added and times shortened – a larger yard will be needed to accommodate the buses. The property leased in South Lake Tahoe is at capacity. The goal would be to build headquarters someplace else, then potentially have workforce housing at the garage.

No land has been identified to service the district's needs. Officials had looked at the old Kingsbury Middle School site, but safety at the intersection at Highway 50 was a main reason that idea got nixed.

Money for such an endeavor is also elusive.

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Notes:

- The TTD board meeting is Sept. 8, 9:30am at the North Tahoe Event Center in Kings Beach.
- The draft plan is available **online**.
- The last day to comment is Sept. 9.