Opinion: Tackling Tahoe's transportation troubles

By Joanne Marchetta

The rural mountain lifestyle we all enjoy at Lake Tahoe is not isolated from the major urban areas nearby. On a typical holiday weekend, the Tahoe basin turns into a recreation thoroughfare as tens of thousands of day and overnight visitors who sustain our local economy drive up from the San Francisco Bay Area, Sacramento and Reno.

During peak times of visitation, this influx of cars and people causes traffic congestion on our limited roadways as residents, commuters, and visitors all struggle to get into, out of, and around communities, and as vehicles gather and park at major recreation attractions.



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Tahoe is taking a systemswide approach to better manage these transportation challenges.

Public and private partners are working together to enhance the basin's transit services, making them more frequent and more reliable, to improve the region's network of bike and pedestrian trails, and to upgrade roadways. Private and nonprofit partners are also stepping up by helping fund projects, running shuttles, bringing new bike share programs

into communities, and partnering with smartphone applications that can help people plan trips to, from, and around Tahoe.

But Lake Tahoe's transportation challenges will be difficult to address. Even today, a shortage of bus drivers is preventing more frequent bus service this winter. There is no one silver bullet, no one entity that can solve all the difficulties. Success will not come overnight. We need to form new public-private partnerships, coordinate better, and work together on these issues as a region.

This December, with help from the Federal Highway Administration, the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency and nearly 60 public and private partners met for an all-day workshop on travel management. The focus was on emerging technologies and best practices we can consider using at Tahoe to better manage traffic congestion and parking problems not only to improve residents' quality of life and visitors' quality of experience, but also to reduce the impact that transportation has on the environment.

Partners at the workshop included local governments, state highway departments, inter-regional transportation agencies, nonprofit groups, ski resorts, lodging associations, chambers of commerce, visitor's authorities, and elected officials. With this broad array of partners and stakeholders in one room, we learned about the technologies and techniques that other tourism communities are using to address transportation issues. We also talked about what we are already doing, what is working and what is not working, and areas where we can work together to grow our initiatives for broader reach and impact.

Our transportation challenges will not solve themselves. Lake Tahoe is in the middle of the rapidly-growing Northern California megaregion, a transportation planning area that includes the Bay Area, Sacramento, Stockton, Truckee, and Reno. As these nearby metropolitan areas continue to grow, we

can expect more and more people will be traveling to Tahoe to recreate.

Fortunately, many new tools are available to us today. Today, nearly everyone has a smartphone. That means they have access to online applications that can provide real-time travel and parking information, help them plan trips to avoid congestion, and book new ride-sharing services that make it easier than ever to carpool.

With the right partnerships and a consistent approach throughout the Tahoe region, people could use these new technologies to learn more about our local transit services, bike share programs, and bike and pedestrian trails to avoid driving altogether, not only to and from Tahoe, but during their stay here.

Through partnership and collaboration, progress is being made all around Lake Tahoe. The 2012 Regional Plan, with its unprecedented public-private partnership for community revitalization and environmental restoration, is delivering a renaissance of projects both big and small that are revitalizing communities, reducing blight, and improving the environment.

More than 50 public, private, and nonprofit partners have made the Lake Tahoe Environmental Improvement Program one of the nation’s most ambitious and successful conservation and restoration initiatives. Partners are continuing to implement projects each year that restore the lake’s famous water clarity, clean up storm water pollution, fight aquatic invasive species, restore meadows and wetlands, improve forest health and reduce wildfire risk, and enhance the public recreation opportunities that drive Lake Tahoe’s $5 billion annual economy.

Lake Tahoe has clearly shown the power of collaboration and public-private partnerships. It’s time to focus that power on

coming together to solve the region’s transportation challenges.

I know we can take our partnership and collaboration to the next level and work together on transportation issues to reduce the traffic congestion in our communities during times of peak visitation, better manage our roadways and parking areas, and make people more aware of alternatives to get to, from, and around Lake Tahoe. Please join us in this work to make Lake Tahoe a healthier, more enjoyable place for all of us, and for future generations to come.

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