Opinion: AT&T, T-Mobile merger is the right move

By Norma Santiago

I fully support the proposed merger of AT&T and T-Mobile.

It is no secret that I am a zealot about economic development and entrepreneurial and environmental innovation. This merger is in the best interest of residents and visitors to our region and will expand broadband Internet services to rural or otherwise disconnected areas.

According to the California Broadband Task Force's commissioned report, more than 80 percent of California's landmass is considered rural and 13 percent of Californians live in these areas. Of the state's 5 million rural residents, 20 percent do not have access to broadband Internet and the remaining 80 percent suffer from spotty and – at best – insufficient coverage. In comparison, 96 percent of their urban and suburban counterparts have broadband access. Clearly, rural Californians are drastically underserved.



Norma Santiago

We live in a technology-driven society. Broadband Internet is no longer a luxury, it's a necessity. High-speed mobile broadband access allows businesses to work efficiently and effectively, to reach a wider range of customers and is critical for economic growth and development in our

communities.

Broadband access improves rural quality of life by giving those previously underserved the ability to do things like, pay bills, monitor healthcare, and take classes online. Web access even makes it easier for residents to keep in touch with friends, family and connect in their community. Broadband access is often taken for granted and accomplishing even the most basic things like sending a letter, downloading a photograph or effectively applying for a job online is a common assumption by those who already have high speed services.

If approved, the proposed merger of AT&T and T-Mobile would effectively, efficiently and cheaply deliver wireless broadband to rural Californians. By combining their assets and infrastructures, merging AT&T and T-Mobile would speed up achieving the goal to give high-speed access to all.

Broadband and mobile broadband Internet access can no longer be viewed as just an option. In today’s world, it is a necessity, and one that many rural Californians find themselves without. This is an economic and social problem that we have an obligation to solve before California’s rural residents find themselves falling technologically even further behind their urban counterparts. The approved AT&T/T-Mobile merger would provide a fast, cheap, and effective fix that would be a huge step forward for both businesses and residents in our rural areas.

Norma Santiago is the El Dorado County supervisor from Lake Tahoe.

First bi-state park in U.S. ready for hikers, bikers, horses

By Kathryn Reed

STATELINE – Making sure there is enough water pressure to fight a fire had been holding up the opening of Van Sickle Bi-State Park. Not anymore. The park officially opens today.

Considering part of the 725-acre park encompasses some of the 673 acres charred in the 2002 Gondola Fire, adequate fire suppression capabilities are a big deal – as it is for any forested area.



Sue, Brenda and Roni straddle the state line at Van Sickle Bi-State Park. Photos/Kathryn Reed

Even though the park was not officially open, people were still accessing the area that is walking distance from the main bed base on the South Shore at the state line.

It is destined to be one of the must-do hikes in the Lake

Tahoe Basin because of the easy accessibility to some incredible views of the emerald water. The only thing that would make the scenery better is to obliterate some of the built environment, but that isn't likely to happen any time soon.

An offshoot, though not yet marked, leads to a vista that captures the sprawling South Shore. Boats bob along in the water. Granite boulders invite one to lounge a while.

With views like this not far from the trail that starts from the upper parking area, it means for those who don't want to or can't hike far, they too, will get to enjoy the natural beauty.

Mount Tallac is the dominant feature besides the lake. With so much snow still on the mountaintops, it's easy to pick out other peaks across the lake like Rubicon.

Massive sugar pines dangle like earrings from trees.

Hiking farther, the trail cuts through part of the 9-year-old burn area – a fire started from a reckless smoker who tossed a cigarette butt out the Heavenly Gondola.

Wildflowers, while not in abundance, are scattered on both sides of the trail.

Initially Van Sickle was supposed to be run by the parks systems in both states. The entrance sign makes it obvious that is not happening. Nevada Division of State Parks and California Tahoe Conservancy are recognized as the operators. This is the only park in the country to cover two states.

California State Parks is in such dire financial straits, what with 70 of 208 parks slated for closure, money for a new one was not to be found.

One advantage of California State Parks not being involved is that dogs are allowed on leash.

Work on the trail that connects to the Tahoe Rim Trail is ongoing, with volunteer crews out in force on Tuesdays and Saturdays.

“As for finishing the trail connector, we are hoping to finish it this year,” Mary Bennington, TRTA executive director, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

If it weren’t for her nonprofit organization, the park would not open at all this summer.

A couple small signs say the trail is not open beyond the waterfall. Nothing at the waterfall says stop, but the trail clearly deteriorates about a half mile farther. As Brenda said, it looks like someone dragged a pick behind her to designate where the trail should be built.

This park was a dream of the late Jack Van Sickle who donated more than two-thirds of the land for the park. His old barn sits in the day use area, as do smaller buildings.

Besides hikers, the park is open to equestrians and mountain bikers. The gate will be open when snow isn’t on the ground; and then from dawn to dusk.

Getting there:

From South Lake Tahoe heading east on Highway 50, turn right on Heavenly Village Way. The park entrance is on Montreal Avenue at Heavenly Village Way. The day use parking is up a short ways, with parking for trail access farther up the road.

A walking path off the driveway entrance is to the right. Foot access is also farther east off the Loop Road behind Harrah’s Lake Tahoe.

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Pool access limited during South Tahoe swim meet

Tahoe Swim Club is having its annual swim meet in South Lake Tahoe July 22-24.

This is a competitive meet for swimmers 18 years of age or younger.

To accommodate the event, the city's pool will close at 1pm July 22 and the entire Recreation & Swim Complex will be closed to the public Saturday and Sunday.

For more information, call (530) 542.6056.

Upping vehicle tax may help pay Incline property owners

By Susan Voyles, Reno Gazette-Journal

Washoe County residents could pay an additional 1 percent tax to register their vehicles to help pay Incline Village property owners $17 million as ordered by the Nevada Supreme Court and to help balance the county budget for years to come, as proposed in a new study.

John Breternitz, commission chairman, on Tuesday told a review panel that the tax is one option commissioners will consider next week to pay tax refunds owed to 8,000 village residents

for the 2006-07 tax year. The vehicle excise tax would generate $8 million a year.

The Supreme Court ruled July 7 that former county treasurer Bill Berrum should have reduced their property taxes after the county board of equalization voted in February 2006 to roll back their property values to 2002-03 levels to comply with an earlier court case.

In a January 2006 ruling, the Carson District Court determined that former county assessor Robert McGowan's methods of appraising Tahoe views, beaches and other unique features were unconstitutional because they were not sanctioned by the state.

In February 2006, the state Supreme Court delayed enforcement of that district ruling calling for refunds while the case was being appealed. The Supreme Court also advised the county to follow the reasoning given by the district court judge, Bill Maddox.

The study by Management Partners, meanwhile, points to the vehicle excise tax as one means of balancing future budgets.

Read the whole story

Cavaliers coach to speak in South Tahoe

Cleveland Cavaliers General Manager Chris Grant – a 1990 South Tahoe High grad – will be giving a talk to area youth July 28 at 9:30am in the theater at Lake Tahoe Community College.

Whooping cough vaccination required for Calif. students

A new California law requires all students entering grades 7-12 have proof of an adolescent whooping cough/pertussis booster shot called Tdap before starting the 2011-12 school year.

To schedule an appointment in South Lake Tahoe, call (530) 573.3155, in Placerville call (530) 621.6100.

Frank Genaro Benevento – 1923-2011

Frankie (Frank) Genaro Benevento, a first generation American born of Italian immigrant parents on April 29, 1923, died July 9, 2011.

He was 88.

Mr. Benevento was born in San Francisco and was raised in San Mateo. He attended San Mateo High School and completed two years at the College of San Mateo.



Frank
Benevento

Mr. Benevento served as a Merchant Marine during WWII and survived the sinking of three ships.

Mr. Benevento was married to his beloved Mary Jane Joly Benevento for 65 years. Much of their married life took place on the San Francisco Peninsula.

Frank and Mary Jane resided in South Lake Tahoe from 1970-88. where Mr. Benevento was a Realtor, business owner, instructor at Lake Tahoe Community College, on the City Council and served as mayor.

Later they returned to the Bay Area. While back in San Mateo he tended a wonderful Italian garden with flowers, vegetables and fruit trees. He was an avid reader and a passionate San Francisco Giants fan, thrilled at last year’s World Series.

Mr. Benevento moved to Visalia in 2008 to be near family.

He was preceded in death by son Brian Benevento (1954-1992).

He is survived by his wife Mary Jane; his children Larry Benevento of Visalia, Danny Benevento of Puerto Morales, Mexico, Melody Heard of Fair Oaks; grandchildren Todd Churchill, Felicia Geller, Antonino (Tony) Benevento, Seth Benevento, Briana Heard, and Shane Benevento; great-grandchildren Zachary Churchill, Trent Churchill, Dillon Churchill, Ryan Geller, James Geller, Griffin Geller, Holden Benevento, Sophia Benevento, Reed Benevento, Seth Hall, and Jayden Hall; daughter-in-law Erlene Benevento; granddaughters

in law Jessica Benevento, Brooke Benevento, Denise Churchill; and grandson-in-law Scott Geller.

A memorial service will be July 27 at 7pm at Christ Lutheran Church, 3830 W. Tulare Ave., Visalia.

Injunction sought to prevent Angora logging

Removing the charred trees from the Angora burn area next week may not happen.



Earth Island Institute's John Muir Project and the Center for Biological Diversity on July 20 filed a request for an emergency injunction in the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals in San Francisco.

The conservation groups earlier this year had sued to stop the South Shore project, but lost in U.S. District Court earlier this month.

The U.S. Forest Service wants to get rid of the trees burned in the June 2007 fire that leveled 254 houses to prevent another catastrophic fire. The environmental groups say that work would destroy the habitat of the black-backed woodpecker.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Backcountry patrollers train for wilderness rescues

More than 30 volunteers completed the annual training program to begin patrolling by bike, foot, or horseback on the backcountry trails around Lake Tahoe.

The training was conducted jointly by the Lake Tahoe Nevada State Park Backcountry Patrol and the Tahoe Rim Trail Association.



Volunteer backcountry patrollers practice loading a patient into a helicopter. Photo/Provided

The training included multiple presentations on topics useful for patrol in the backcountry, including equestrian issues which included the opportunity for patrollers to safely handle and secure a loose horse; a bike repair session that covered basic repairs in a field environment; a medical scenario that included a CareFlight medical helicopter flying in and educating the group on helicopter safety and patient packaging; proper radio use, rapid medical assessments; and a presentation on “Verbal Judo”. Verbal Judo is described as the

gentle art of persuasion. It will assist the patrollers in handling difficult people and gain voluntary compliance from errant park users.

Now in its 10th year, the patrol is part of the International Mountain Bicycling Association's National Mountain Bike Patrol program. The 50-plus active patrolers are responsible for approximately 2,000 assists during the summer riding season. These are usually questions about the park history, trail recommendations, or riding etiquette; but the patrollers are also ready to fix a flat tire, bandage a wound, or assist with an emergency evacuation.

The patrol operates primarily out of Lake Tahoe Nevada State Park. The patrol also partners with the Tahoe Rim Trail Association to cover other areas.

For more information on the patrol, go online or email info@tahoebikepatrol.org.

USFS planning thinning project near Upper Echo Lakes

The U.S. Forest Service Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit is seeking public input on the Upper Echo Lakes Hazardous Fuels Reduction project. The proposed action includes tree thinning and surface fuels reduction that is intended to reduce the risk of wildfire and improve firefighting effectiveness.

The project area is located on National Forest land within the wildland urban interface on approximately 100 acres at Upper Echo Lake in El Dorado County, with a portion in the Pyramid Roadless area.

Brief closures of areas adjacent to the Pacific Crest Trail are possible.

The proposed treatments would establish a defense zone around seasonal residence cabins and outbuildings. Cabin owners would retain the responsibility to maintain their defensible space improvements.

Fuel reduction work would consist of cutting and hand piling brush and conifer trees up to 16 inches in diameter. Vegetation would be cut by hand, with chainsaws or other hand tools. Piles would then be burned approximately one to three years later, once the fuels are dry and weather conditions allow for prescribed burning. Larger trees would be made available for fuelwood.

Work could begin as early as this fall and might take up to six years to complete, depending on funding and availability of burn days.

The public comment period ends on Aug. 15. Information is available at the Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit Forest Supervisor’s office, 35 College Drive, South Lake Tahoe, or online.

For more information, contact Duncan Leao at (530) 543.2600 or email comments-pacificsouthwest-ltbmu@fs.fed.us using the subject: Upper Echo Lakes Fuel Reduction Project.