

Caltrans seeks 5,000 motorists for mileage fee pilot program

By Dan Weikel, Los Angeles Times

Caltrans is seeking 5,000 volunteers for an experimental program that will charge motorists a fee based on how far they drive – a proposal that could replace the state gas tax as a way to fund highway maintenance and repairs.

Volunteers will participate in the California Road Charge Pilot Program, which was created by the Legislature in 2014 to test the feasibility of so-called mileage-based user fees.

The dry run is scheduled to begin this summer and last for nine months. Participating motorists will test various mileage reporting methods, but they won't be charged fees for the distances they drive.

[Read the whole story](#)

Tahoe Fund tasked with defining next generation of visitors' centers

By Kathryn Reed

What will the visitors' centers of the future look like and will they even exist?

Those questions are expected to be answered by next summer after the Tahoe Fund delves into what might suit Lake Tahoe's needs the best.

There are various centers around the basin from chamber operated entities to U.S. Forest Service run outlets to municipality led enterprises like Explore Tahoe in South Lake Tahoe.

Visitors' centers have been losing their appeal because these days people are more likely to look up information on a smart phone or tablet. But they still have a role to play because the brick and mortar location usually has someone who can answer questions in a way that a Google search might not be as responsive, and they have other resources to disseminate. Plus, they are often at a central location people want to explore.



Explore Tahoe opened in 2007 as a collaborative effort between South Lake Tahoe, California Tahoe Conservancy, U.S. Forest Service and Tahoe Heritage Foundation. Photo/LTN

"The goal is to see what works best for Tahoe," Patrick

Wright, executive director of the California Tahoe Conservancy, told his board.

The board agreed to allocate \$85,000 to the visitor information and environmental interpretation project. The nonprofit Tahoe Fund is putting in \$10,000.

The idea has in large part morphed from Bonnie Turnbull's idea of creating a discovery center on the South Shore. The South Lake Tahoe resident was at the CTC meeting last month and expressed her support for how things are evolving.

Jeff Marsolais, supervisor for the Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit and non-voting member on the CTC board, welcomes the study, noting his agency will have a big stake in the outcome. He also expressed how expensive it is to maintain and operate visitors' centers.

The staff report highlights how things got to this point: "...after an extensive series of discussions, the group concluded that they first needed a thorough assessment of the needs and desires of both residents and visitors for new or expanded facilities, and to explore alternative approaches to meeting those needs, given the enormous cost of building and maintaining educational and interpretive facilities."

Wright pointed out how Tahoe is unique in that there is not one point of entry like most national parks. He said California State Parks is looking at creating mobile centers. There is also the option of pop up centers.

It will be up to the Tahoe Fund to reach consensus, if possible, on what is best for the basin. Initial planning will begin soon. Public workshops and vision planning are likely to occur in March. A design charrette and final report are expected in June.

OD'ing propels rise in death rates of young whites

By Gina Kolata and Sarah Cohen, New York Times

Drug overdoses are driving up the death rate of young white adults in the United States to levels not seen since the end of the AIDS epidemic more than two decades ago – a turn of fortune that stands in sharp contrast to falling death rates for young blacks, a New York Times analysis of death certificates has found.

The rising death rates for those young white adults, ages 25 to 34, make them the first generation since the Vietnam War years of the mid-1960s to experience higher death rates in early adulthood than the generation that preceded it.

The *Times* analyzed nearly 60 million death certificates collected by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention from 1990 to 2014. It found death rates for non-Hispanic whites either rising or flattening for all the adult age groups under 65 – a trend that was particularly pronounced in women – even as medical advances sharply reduce deaths from traditional killers like heart disease. Death rates for blacks and most Hispanic groups continued to fall.

[Read the whole story](#)

Uber, Lyft expand service to Reno airport

Uber and Lyft can now pick up and drop off passengers at Reno-Tahoe International Airport.

Prior to the Jan. 20 announcement the drivers picked up their fares outside the airport or dropped them off nearby.

About 3.4 million use the Reno airport each year.

Uber and Lyft are also operating in the Lake Tahoe area.

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*

Lake Tahoe bill clears key Senate committee

By Bill Theobald, USA Today

WASHINGTON – Democrats and Republicans found a rare subject they could agree on Wednesday: Lake Tahoe and surrounding land is worth improving and protecting.

The Senate Environment and Public Works Committee easily passed the Lake Tahoe Restoration Act of 2015 by voice vote and sent it to the full Senate.

The bill authorizes \$415 million in federal funds over 10 years to improve the clarity of the lake, reduce the potential for severe forest fires on the surrounding land, and prevent

the spread of invasive species.

Read the whole story

2015 shatters record as warmest year

By Bill Chappell, NPR

It's not rare for a year to break record temperatures. But it's now happened two years in a row – and 2015 was “very, very clearly the warmest year by a long chalk,” says Gavin Schmidt, director of NASA's Goddard Institute for Space Studies.

NASA is presenting the annual review of global average temperatures in conjunction with NOAA, which says that not only did 2015 finish as the warmest year on record, but it did so by the widest margin ever – nearly a third of 1 degree Fahrenheit warmer than 2014's average.

In 2015, the average temperature on land and ocean surfaces around the world was “1.62° F (0.90° C) above the 20th century average,” according to NOAA.

Read the whole story

Study: More plastic than fish in oceans by 2050

By Ivana Kottasova, CNN

The world is flooded with garbage.

There will be more plastic than fish in terms of weight in the world's oceans by 2050, the World Economic Forum warned Tuesday.

Plastic has become one of the world's most popular materials, combining amazing functionality and very low production costs. Its use has increased 20-fold in the past 50 years and is expected to double again in the next 20 years.

Almost everybody in the world comes into contact with it – over a quarter of all plastic is used for packaging, the most popular use of the material.

Read the whole story

Pro skier JT Holmes survives avalanche burial

By Benjamin Spillman, Reno Gazette-Journal

Pro skier JT Holmes says he's still shaken five days after being buried and going unconscious in an avalanche northwest of Lake Tahoe.

Holmes, who is known for pushing the boundaries of big mountain skiing and speed riding, said he was skiing with

friends on Thursday near Truckee when the slide occurred during the group's fourth run of the day.



JT Holmes

Holmes said he was in a group of eight in the backcountry between Tinker Knob and Donner Lake, skiing a north or northeast aspect in complex terrain with trees, chutes and gullies and which he estimated was at about 7,400 feet in elevation.

"I got flushed through, went downhill with the avalanche," Holmes said. "The second wave of the avalanche buried me."

[Read the whole story](#)

Out-of-bounds snowboarder faces criminal charges

A snowboarder skiing in a closed area of Sugar Bowl Ski Resort faces trespassing charges.

Resort officials say Christian Michael Mares triggered an avalanche at approximately 12:45pm Jan. 15 after knowingly traversing into an area of the East Palisades called Perco's. This area has not been open to the public since the 2010-11 ski season. The area is marked as closed from the Mt. Disney

and Mt. Lincoln directions, and it is a very active avalanche area.

The Friday avalanche is not connected in any way with the search for missing Sugar Bowl ski instructor Carson May, according to the resort.

“Normally, when skiers or riders choose to enter into a closed area, resort management will pull the skier’s pass for a duration of time, ban the skier for the remainder of the season or, if serious enough, for multiple seasons. However, since Mares is not a Sugar Bowl season passholder and given the magnitude and severity of this situation, and the fact that patrol, staff and public were put at serious risk from Mares’ decisions and actions, Sugar Bowl has now turned this incident over to the Placer County Sheriff’s Department for prosecution under California Penal Code 602(r), which refers to trespassing into a closed area of a ski resort,” the resort said in a statement.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

S. Lake Tahoe says yes to using plastic bags

By Kathryn Reed

South Lake Tahoe has done a 180 on being an environmental leader, according to some people.

It all has to do with plastic bags.

The council on a 3-2 vote Jan. 19 said only grocery stores and food outlets must adhere to the plastic bag ban. Mayor Wendy David and Councilmember Austin Sass were in the minority.

There had been a misunderstanding by Councilmember Hal Cole at the original vote in 2014. He thought the council was going to discuss how things were going before the ban expanded instead of automatically encompassing other establishments a year later – which was in October 2015. That is why last fall he asked to revoke the ordinance beyond grocery stores and restaurants.

Cole is also concerned about the economic repercussions on businesses. He also pointed out that businesses could always voluntarily not use plastic bags.

But at no time when the revocation has been discussed has there been mention to assess how the bag ban is working. No business person has either come forward at a meeting or written a letter asking to retain the use of plastic bags.

Instead, the vote was based on personal preference and not facts based on zero evidence being presented at the meetings as to the ban being negative for businesses.

Sass asked if any businesses have complained about the ban. City Clerk Suzie Alessi said not to her knowledge.

Councilwoman JoAnn Conner said people are afraid to speak up for fear of retribution.

Sentiments from the public included:

- Jerry Goodman: The council is not environmentally sensitive.
- Joe Stanton: The real compromise would be to allow businesses to use their existing plastic bag supply before implementing the ban. People come to Tahoe because they see it as an environmental leader, but rescinding the bag ban

delivers the opposite message.

- Bruce Grego: There is no environmental impact by having a plastic bag ban. Paper bags aren't as useful.

- Pete Fink: It's about bringing your own bag; plastic bags weren't around when he was a kid; Europe is doing just fine without plastic and the U.S. could be in the same boat.

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In other news:

- A taxi driver questioned why the city is allowing Uber to operate here. City Attorney Tom Watson said it's a state issue and the city has no control.

- Hilary Roverud is interim director Development Services because Shawna Brekke-Reid left earlier this month.

- The city eliminated the following subcommittees: airport master plan, Lake Tahoe Unified-Lake Tahoe Community College memorandum of understanding (for the fields), parks and rec master plan, policy for giving to nonprofits, single room occupancy and warm room.

- Subcommittees added include development services code (Sass-Cole) and Champions Plaza (David-Tom Davis).

- Representation to the two chambers of commerce, lodging association and South Tahoe Public Utility District remain intact after being proposed for elimination.