

School construction bill passes Nev. Senate

By Ray Hagar, Reno Gazette-Journal

The Nevada Senate passed a bill that would pave the way for new school construction across the state Monday, while ending Nevada's long-standing practice of paying prevailing wages on state-sponsored construction projects.

The bill, Senate Bill 119, would allow an extension of bond rollover funds from property taxes for school districts to keep pace with the need for new schools and major repairs on existing schools. Nevada's two urban school districts – Clark and Washoe counties – are either in dire need of major renovation projects or new schools.

Although Democrats and Republicans both acknowledge the need for funding school construction, the passage of the bill was on strict party lines.

Read the whole story

Bill would allow dogs in Nevada bars

By Associated Press

Nevada lawmakers reviewed a bill Monday that would allow people to bring their dogs with them into taverns and saloons, but it got a less-than-cuddly response from health officials concerned about slobber and dog hair in cocktails.

The Senate Government Affairs Committee discussed SB105 on Monday, which is sponsored by Sen. James Settelmeyer.

The Minden Republican said the proposal originated from constituents in the small town of Virginia City. It would allow businesses to open their doors to pups if they choose. He noted a number of eateries across the country welcome dogs.

The lawmaker noted that service animals are already allowed in bars and business owners should be allowed to cater to a dog-loving niche.

But officials from several health departments opposed the bill, saying dog hair and bodily fluids might cross-contaminate food or drink. Unruly dogs could bite patrons, and employees would have to be trained on how to safely interact with the dogs, according to lobbyist Dan Musgrove, who represents the Southern Nevada Health District and spoke against the bill.

“I’m an animal lover from birth,” Musgrove said, “but in respect to this, I think we have to stand firm and say we just can’t allow them inside.”

Tahoe making case for federal transit dollars

By Kathryn Reed

Tahoe Transportation District officials are in Washington, D.C., this week on a mission to convince lawmakers to pass the federal transportation bill that would bring money to the Lake Tahoe Basin.

The Trans-Sierra Transportation Plan and Coalition is a loose coalition of six California jurisdictions and five from Nevada that have an economic interest in a functioning regional transit system.

"We will have more of a benefit working together instead of competing against each other," Carl Hasty, executive director of TTD, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

With state and federal highways surrounding the basin and being the conduits to enter and exit the basin, local officials want a bigger piece of the financial pie.

But the region has long been shortchanged on its share of funding because it is considered a rural area. And while the permanent population fits the rural description, what isn't part of the equation is the tourist population. With those added vehicles on the roads, it puts a strain on infrastructure that was not designed to sustain them. The local dollars plus what comes from the two states and feds are not enough to maintain the roads or create a transit system that functions for everyone.

The TTD board on Feb. 13 heard a presentation about the Trans-Sierra plan as well as an update on Lake Tahoe's Highway Corridors and Inter-Regional Long-Range Transit Plan.

The staff report said, "Given the physical and environmental constraints of Lake Tahoe and the region, increased investments in transit will be key for getting a growing number of visitors and workers to and from their destinations with less congestion and fewer environmental impacts. Improved bus service, light rail transit, bus rapid transit, water taxis and ferries, and services for our senior and disabled friends and neighbors are all part of the Trans-Sierra Transportation Plan."

It would take \$35 billion to do all of the projects the jurisdictions have on the books. Hasty said \$19 billion is

realistic number for what could be funded. Included in that is the loop road on the South Shore and Fanny Bridge replacement in Tahoe City.

That sort of investment would increase the odds the region would be able to attract large events like the X Games or the Olympics. A coalition is still working on bringing the Winter Games to the area in 2026.

Information from staff said, "The wide open spaces and attractions of the Trans-Sierra Region straddle what has been dubbed the Northern California megapolitan, the fast growing urban area stretching from San Francisco, through Sacramento, to Reno. The Northern California megapolitan is home to some 15 million people today, and this number is expected to increase by an estimated 25-30 percent by the year 2035."

Hasty and Alfred Knotts, TTD planner, will be talking with folks in the administration as well as congressional staff about Lake Tahoe's needs.

"There is all kinds of talk going on in D.C. What there isn't talk about is any growth in the program," Hasty said.

The corridor concept is a layered approach to planning where transit, bike-pedestrian issues and roadways are all considered. It considers recreation, commuter, tourist and public transportation. And in doing so it means engaging a slew of stakeholders to make it all work.

Highway 28 in Incline Village is the corridor that received the most attention and work to date. Each corridor is different and will need different things.

All of this will be incorporated into the update of the Regional Transportation Plan that is due in 2016. It must be updated every four years. But instead of TTD or the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency doing so in a silo, components of the plan that are already being worked on by other entities will

be compiled into the document so it is a collaborative, comprehensive document without redundancy.

FAA releases proposed rules on commercial drones

By Joan Lowy, AP

WASHINGTON – Drone on, the government says.

Just not through the night sky. Or close to an airport. Or out of the operator's sight. And probably not winging its way with a pizza or package, any time soon.

Long-anticipated rules proposed Sunday will open an era in which small (under 55 pounds) commercial unmanned aircraft perform routine tasks – crop monitoring, aerial photography, inspections of bridges and cell towers, and much more. But not right away. Final rules are probably two to three years away.

And when they are in place, they may include a separate category with fewer restrictions for very small drones, likely to be defined as less than 4.4 pounds.

The Federal Aviation Administration released a variety of proposed requirements for commercial operators to meet, such as passing a knowledge test administered by the agency as well as a federal security check. The small drones could travel as fast as 100 mph, at altitudes of 500 feet or lower. Flights over people except those involved in the drone's operation would be prohibited.

"We have tried to be flexible in writing these rules," said FAA Administrator Michael Huerta. "We want to maintain today's

outstanding level of aviation safety without placing an undue regulatory burden on an emerging industry.”

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The agency is researching technology that he hopes will eventually enable small drones to fly safely beyond the sight of operators, Huerta said. He emphasized that introduction of commercial drones into the national airspace will be a staged process. The government is also looking ahead to how larger drones might be allowed to fly in airspace shared by manned aircraft, for example, he said.

One of the key safety concerns is that without a human on board the ability to “see and avoid” other aircraft is limited. Another concern is that the link between the operator and a remote control aircraft can be broken, causing the drone to fly away until it loses power or collides with something.

Cases of flyaway drones getting stuck in trees or hitting buildings are rampant. Last month, a drone that its operator lost control of flew over the White House fence and crashed on the lawn before Secret Service agents could block it.

Even with the proposed safety restrictions, drones can transform urban infrastructure management, farming, public safety, coastal security, military training, search and rescue, disaster response and more, the White House said in a presidential memorandum on privacy released in conjunction with the rules.

The memorandum lays out measures federal agencies must follow to guard against abuse of data collected in their drone flights. Among other steps, the order requires agencies to review privacy and civil rights protections before deploying drone technology and to adhere to a range of controls. Personally identifiable information collected in drone flights is to be kept no longer than 180 days, although there are exceptions.

It's questionable whether such steps will satisfy civil liberties advocates, who've objected strongly to the government's vigorous use of digital surveillance in the name of national security. But drone advocates were generally happy with the proposal, although they disagreed with some of the details.

"I am very pleased to see a much more reasonable approach to future regulation than many feared," said Brendan Schulman, a New York attorney who unsuccessfully challenged FAA's restrictions on drone flights.

The agency currently bans commercial drone flights except for a few dozen companies that have been granted waivers. That ban will stay in place until regulations become final, but FAA officials plan to continue granting waivers case by case. About 300 waiver requests are pending and new requests are being filed almost daily.

The proposed rules are "a good first step" bringing the U.S. closer to realizing the benefits of drone technology, said Brian Wynne, president and CEO of the Association for Unmanned Vehicle Systems International, a trade group.

An FAA analysis points to an estimate by the trade association that drones will create 70,000 jobs with an economic impact of more than \$13.6 billion in the first three years after their integration into U.S. skies.

In a big concession to industry, the FAA said it won't require an "airworthiness certificate" for small drones. The design and manufacture of each model of manned airplanes and helicopters go through a rigorous approval process by the FAA before they are granted airworthiness certificates. That can take years.

The FAA decided that drone technology was changing so rapidly that by the time a model received an airworthiness certificate the remote-controlled aircraft might already be out of date,

Huerta said.

Calif. population expected to outstrip water conservation

By Matt Weiser, Sacramento Bee

California water agencies are on track to satisfy a state mandate to reduce water consumption 20 percent by 2020. But according to their own projections, that savings won't be enough to keep up with population growth just a decade later.

A 2009 state law requires urban water agencies to reduce per-capita water consumption 20 percent by 2020, compared with use at the start of the century. Most agencies are on track to reach that goal, and have made even more progress thanks to emergency cuts over the past year triggered by the ongoing drought.

However, by 2030, the data show, these savings will be more than erased by anticipated population growth. According to projections by the water agencies themselves, their total water deliveries will increase 16 percent by 2030 compared to their estimates for 2015.

California's population, already larger than all other Western states combined, is expected to grow 14 percent during that same period, reaching an estimated 44 million people by 2030, according to the state Department of Finance.

Read the whole story

Recreational pot: \$53 mil. tax boon to Colo.

By CNNMoney

It's been a year since Colorado became the first state in the nation to allow people to sell and buy pot legally in January 2014.

And the state took in \$53 million in tax revenue as a result.

Colorado made pot legal for everyone, not just medical patients, but it also slapped a 28% tax rate on sales.

While \$53 million isn't anything to sniff at, it's not as much of a windfall as everyone was hoping for.

Read the whole story

N. Nevada land bill couples development, scenic wilderness

By Steve Tetreault, Las Vegas Review Journal

WASHINGTON — A Nevada bill submitted to Congress on Thursday would realign federal lands in Douglas County, opening some for development while creating a 12,330-acre scenic wilderness.

The measure would designate the Burbank Canyons Wilderness in the Pine Nut Mountains northwest of Wellington. The area of three deep scenic canyons is prized by conservationists for an abundance of sagebrush, pinyon pine and juniper.

Sixty-seven acres would be given to the state of Nevada to add to Lake Tahoe Nevada State Park, while 1,000 acres would be put into trust for the Washoe Tribe of California and Nevada.

Read the whole story

TRPA goes after AIS money from Nevada

The Tahoe Regional Planning Agency wants Nevada to spend \$75,000 in the next two years to protect Lake Tahoe from invasive aquatic species.

TRPA Executive Director Joanne Marchetta on Feb. 13 told lawmakers that the program costs \$1.5 million, with the feds and California helping to pay for the program. Fees from boaters account for half of the budget.

The program fights to keep species like the quagga and zebra mussels from the lake through education and decontamination programs.

The funding is in Gov. Brian Sandoval's budget.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Gaming industry to launch outreach initiative for presidential campaign

By Howard Stutz, Las Vegas Review-Journal

The American Gaming Association will launch a national initiative in conjunction with the 2016 presidential campaign aimed at showing the industry's economic benefits to candidates for the nation's highest office.

The effort, dubbed "Gaming Votes," is twofold – to educate casino industry employees, vendors and other stakeholders on candidate positions on gaming, and to ensure candidates understand the industry's economic contributions.

The organization wants to make gaming issues a topic for discussion during the campaign and change "false" perceptions about the casino industry.

During a presentation on the effort in Las Vegas on Thursday, the association cited a new Oxford Economics report on the broad base of jobs gaming companies provide and diversity in the industry's workforce.

Read the whole story

Raley's extinguishing tobacco sales

By KXTV

You won't find cigarettes and tobacco chew on the store shelves of Raley's, Bel Air and Nob Hill Foods by the end of February, according to Raley's.

The West Sacramento-based grocery store chain has made the decision to cease sales of tobacco products to promote health and wellness.

According to Raley's public affairs director Chelsea Minor, the company has already stopped ordering tobacco products.

In a statement, Raley's said, "the evidence against tobacco usage is simply too strong to ignore. Raley's decision to remove tobacco products is our next big step in ongoing efforts to provide healthier options and to raise awareness about health and wellness."

Last year, CVS drugstores stopped selling tobacco products and renamed itself CVS Health. Other big retailers, such as Walmart and Walgreens, said they have no plans at the time to halt tobacco product sales.

Read the whole story