

Byren Written Comments at TRPA Oversight Committee 6-7-24

I am a resident of Hidden Woods on the East Shore of Lake Tahoe. Like many in our community, I am concerned about the threat of wildfires in the Lake Tahoe Basin and am pleased that the Oversight Committee has included forest health and evacuation planning as part of today's agenda. None of us want to see Lake Tahoe become another Paradise, CA or Lahaina, HI.

The Caldor Fire has served as a stark reminder that this area is particularly vulnerable.

- We are surrounded by an overgrown and mis-managed national forest, where the overarching wildfire policy is to just "let it burn".
- Our evacuation response during Caldor was a miserable failure, resulting in a 3-1/2 hour traffic jam along the South and East Shores according to City officials.
- Our firefighting infrastructure lacks the necessary personnel and high elevation air assets to fight a major fire.
- AND our evacuation egress corridors are few, lacking in alternatives, and well under capacity for a major disaster.

That said, Nevada State and Douglas County officials have killed the CMP "road-diet" proposal and have recently established US 50 as a primary 4-lane evacuation corridor. State and Local officials are also well along in the evacuation planning process, including plans to stage firefighting helicopters and personnel within the basin.

There is one element of TRPA's 7-7-7 Transportation Plan that remains troublesome. The present Corridor Management Plan calls for a 3-leg roundabout at the US 50 and SR28 intersection, with no bypass provision for wildfire evacuation. Earlier this year, I sent a white paper to NDOT and Wood Rogers proposing an alternative configuration, a grade-separation Trumpet-style interchange. After the April 8th Nevada Transportation Board meeting Scott Hein, NDOT's Assistant Director for Engineering, confirmed that this approach would be included in the Intersection Control Evaluation for Spooner Junction, but no action to date.

While both intersection configurations support the Federal Highway Administration's Zero-Vision Action Plan, the trumpet-style configuration has several significant advantages:

- First, it eliminates left-turn movements, improving traffic flow in all directions.
- Second, it eliminates weaving movements within the proposed traffic circle, avoiding a particular class of non-fatal accidents.

- Third, it eliminates crossing movements for bicycles and pedestrians.
- And finally (and most importantly) it facilitates high-capacity wildfire evacuation, without the need for additional bypass lanes and lane reconfigurations.

The down-side is cost.

It should be noted that NDOT has already built a trumpet interchange on the Carson Valley side of US 50 at Golf Club Drive. This is a beautifully-designed intersection that serves a rather small number of wealthy homeowners and patrons of the Clear Creek Tahoe golf club community. Given the documented need for improved safety at the Spooner Summit intersection and future plans for a new mobility hub (including park-n-ride, mass transit, multi-use path, AIS inspection, and pedestrian crossing to Spooner State Park), the TRPA and NDOT are already committed to changing the intersection configuration at SR28.

I am asking that the TRPA support, financially and otherwise, the construction of a Trumpet Interchange at Spooner Junction as part of its Transportation Plan.

Thank you!

Robert W. Byren