

## TAHOE REGIONAL PLANNING AGENCY

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# ***Let's Make Lake Tahoe More Bicycle Friendly***

**By John Singlaub, Executive Director**

Much has been written and said in the past month about riding bicycles here at Lake Tahoe: Bike to Work Week, America's Most Beautiful Bike Ride, and local photographer Rick Gunn's completion of his around-the-world, three-year bike trip to name a few examples. TRPA and many agency partners are moving forward with planning and construction of additional bike trails around the Lake. We actually have a master plan that spells out where new trails and connections are needed. While we have a lot of challenges to overcome to achieve the vision of being a true bike-friendly community, there's a great deal of energy moving us in this direction.

A public workshop was held in May to establish goals for Nevada's east shore bike trail. The North Tahoe Public Utility District continues to move ahead on the Dollar Hill to Tahoe Vista bike trail, and the Tahoe City PUD has the go-ahead to complete the Homewood portion of the west shore bike trail, both projects using funding from the California Tahoe Conservancy. Since the Tahoe Regional Compact requires TRPA to find alternatives to the automobile for transportation at the Lake, we have been heavily involved in all of these efforts, helping facilitate bike trail projects and the addition of bike lanes to our roadways.

Many of us were impressed and inspired by Rick Gunn's around-the-world bike trip, and can only imagine his experiences in so many countries, cultures and conditions. I was sufficiently inspired by his adventures to sign up for Bike to Work Week this year along with 464 other riders, and while Rick may laugh, I had a few experiences of my own.

First, I set out on a trial run on my mountain bike after work the week before, just to find the best route. Highway 50 from my home in Skyland near Zephyr Cove to my office at Stateline, is only 5 miles, but has some of the most dangerous stretches of roadway from a bike rider's perspective at the Lake. Four lanes of

traffic move fast on curving roads with no shoulder, and the white stripe delineating the edge of the road squares up with the guard rails.

In order to get off the highway, I thought that I could use at least portions of the Old Lincoln Highway that extended along this stretch of the Lake, but many parts of the old public right-of-way have been gated and locked by private homeowners, or have been obliterated by new roads. One stretch near Round Hill is even signed and is part of the original Lake Bigler Toll Road. A paved trail goes from Round Hill to Kingsbury Grade, but there was no way to avoid the worst part of Highway 50 from Zephyr Cove to Round Hill. So I concluded that just riding the highway on my road bike would be the easiest, shortest and most direct route to take. On the way home, I was cruising along the shoulder, dodging the construction cones that were left on the side of the road for the night, when a car raced past me in the curb lane nearly clipping my handlebars, and blasting his horn at me. No other cars were on the road, so it was clear this individual was just trying to harass me. Not a very good start.

Monday I left the house early and made the five-mile ride with a gross elevation gain of 587 feet in about 25 minutes. Coming home went without a hitch. Tuesday was a different story. Approaching Round Hill, about half-way to work and hugging the edge of the road with cars whizzing by, I passed over several storm drain grates that gave the bike quite a jolt. As I was approaching the last grate in a series, I noticed at the last second that the standard mesh only covered half the drain, and that the other half, inexplicably, was made of bars lined parallel with the roadway, with openings just wide enough to swallow my wheel. I slammed into the drain and barely remained upright, but both tires were blown. With only one spare tube, I turned around and walked the bike back home, and regrettably, drove my car to work.

Wednesday I was working on the north shore, so didn't try to ride, but Thursday and Friday I rode my mountain bike with wide enough tires to withstand the storm grates, and allowing me to take the trails and stay off the highway as much as possible. By the end of my ride home on Friday, I figured I was barely beating the odds of getting hit by a car, and conceded that until either bike lanes or bike trails are available, driving my car to work was the safest option. Unfortunately, for some members of our community, there's no choice but to walk or bike in these dangerous conditions and we need to address this dilemma.

Every agency and organization at Lake Tahoe, especially including CalTrans and NDOT, must work together to make Lake Tahoe a more bicycle friendly environment. To accomplish this, we must – among other things – look to secure a regional revenue source to fund bicycle infrastructure. We should also consider policies that leverage bicycle and pedestrian facilities along with road and highway improvements. We can no longer afford (literally!) to drive our cars everywhere. For so many reasons, making it easier to ride our bikes is critical for the future of Lake Tahoe. Reducing exhaust emissions and greenhouse gases

from automobiles is important. Improving recreational bike riding opportunities would mean a vital boost for the local tourism economy. Providing safe bike lanes and trails for residents to use to bike to work, school, or the store, is imperative. TRPA is committed to harnessing the positive energy around becoming more bicycle and pedestrian friendly for the benefit of our health, our economy, and our environment.

For more information on bike riding opportunities at Lake Tahoe and to see how you can help make Tahoe more bike friendly, contact the Lake Tahoe Bicycle Coalition, [www.tahoebike.org](http://www.tahoebike.org) or visit [www.trpa.org](http://www.trpa.org) to review our bike and pedestrian master plan.

- *John Singlaub is Executive Director of the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency.*