MOUNTAIN TOWNS 2030

WORKSHOP · TUE, OCT 13 · 2:30-3:30 PM

From Vision to Reality: Car-Free, Care-Free Tahoe

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South Lake Tahoe stacked microtransit, cleared bike paths, a gondola, resort shuttles and parking management into Car-Free, Care-Free Tahoe, a park-once campaign that sells going car-free as part of the vacation. A nonprofit, a city and a ski resort shared how they built it piece by piece instead of waiting for a $2 billion plan.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. **Sell the experience, not the environment.** Decades of asking visitors to leave cars home to protect the lake didn't work. The campaign never mentions the environment; it promises deals, local tips and a better trip.
2. **Layer what already exists.** Fixed routes, Lake Link microtransit, bike paths, scooters, the Heavenly gondola and resort shuttles feed each other, so guests can park once wherever they stay.
3. **Pilots must build toward the bigger vision.** One-year pilots that vanish leave a memory of failure. The Emerald Bay shuttle was designed to connect the whole system and was taken over by the transit district within a year.
4. **Parking management is the stick.** Heavenly's peak-day parking reservations, with free preferred parking for carpools, were unpopular at first but cut roadside parking and freed shuttles to reach transit hubs.
5. **Each partner plays a different role.** The city builds, clears snow and funds transit. The nonprofit pilots, convenes and takes public heat. The resort runs shuttles and reaches its guests.

WHAT LOCAL OFFICIALS CAN DO

- ☐ **Start with what you already do,** like tweaking existing shuttle routes to hit transit hubs, before chasing big infrastructure.
- ☐ **Pilot a small park-once district first,** such as an area where parking is already paid, and work closely with the businesses there. It can be done in a season.
- ☐ **Cherry-pick projects from your regional transportation plan** so pilots carry ideas experts already support, then prove ridership.
- ☐ **Back new service with parking changes.** Sign, enforce and physically block illegal roadside parking. Some drivers will pay a $300 fine anyway.
- ☐ **Use new development to fund transit.** South Lake's new event center pays a $3 per-ticket surcharge toward transit as a permit condition.
- ☐ **Give partners a ready-made content kit** with maps, email and social copy, so everyone uses the same terms.
- ☐ **Use smaller vehicles where you can.** Microtransit vans don't need commercial licenses, and year-round service eases driver hiring.

BY THE NUMBERS

~17M
Visitor days per year at Lake Tahoe

~10M
Cars coming to Lake Tahoe each year

2/3
South Shore transit service lost in 2018 cuts

~$2B
Cost of the full Tahoe regional transportation plan

~$750K
Raised for transit by the event center's $3 ticket fee

3 years
Nonprofit goal to fund a pilot, a good marker of uptake

WATCH OUT FOR

- ! Fine sediment from roads is the top cause of lost lake clarity, but environmental messaging alone didn't change driving habits.
- ! Driver staffing is a constant challenge, and enforcement agencies often won't remove illegal parking until alternatives exist.

RESOURCES

Keep Tahoe Blue (League to Save Lake Tahoe)
Nonprofit behind the Car-Free, Care-Free Tahoe campaign

Tahoe Transportation District
tahoetransportation.org

City of South Lake Tahoe (Lake Link microtransit)
cityofslt.us

South Shore Transportation Management Association
Public-private TMA that plans South Shore routes long term

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Summarized from the session recording and presenter slides. Figures are as presented; confirm with presenters before citing.

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