

**Fact Check: CMP Public Comment Analysis
Dana Tibbitts, TESA**

When it comes to public comment regarding the Tahoe East Shore Corridor Management Plan and outreach to the community, NDOT makes frequent reference to its numbers: 3 rounds of noticed public outreach. 50 meetings. More than 780 participants. 1530 comments. These public comments are summarized and categorized by staff and transferred into notation form from sticky notes, comment cards, notations made on the maps, and electronic submissions.

Until September of 2023, little was known or shared concerning the substance of these comments. So, in August of 2023, Tahoe East Shore Alliance (TESA) filed a records request with NDOT for all records related to public comments so we could see what was actually said.

In late August, our request produced 1067 comments (of the 1500+ claimed) from three rounds of meetings, which we have reviewed in detail. Our analysis considered only those comments which directly address the proposed plan feature of 2 or 4 through traffic lanes for the reconfigured US 50. Other comments focus on plan details such as turning lanes, stop lights, speed limits, parking and other safety factors for drivers and pedestrians.

Round 1 comments from Wood-Rogers public outreach in June/July of 2021 offer a total of 412 comments. Only 31 of these specifically address the number of through lanes. Of those, 25 favor 4 lanes and 6 favor 2 lanes.

Round 2 public outreach in March-April 2022 includes 496 public comments. 84 of these specifically support the 4-lane option, 5 support 2 lanes, and 7 are unclear as to their preferred number of lanes.

Round 3 from October 27 at Kahle Community Center and November 3 at Lake Tahoe Visitor Authority show comments from 159 participants of which 91 refer specifically to through traffic lanes. 80 are pro-4-lane, 10 are pro-2-lane and 1 is non-specific.

By aggregating lane option preferences specified by 218 total respondents, we find 189 residents favor 4 lanes, 21 favor 2 lanes, and 8 are unclear (Table 1).

Table 1. Comments from CMP Outreach participants

Listening Tour	Total Respondents	Comments on Lane Configuration	Number of Respondents Supporting 4 Lanes	Number of Respondents Supporting 2 Lanes	Number of Respondents Uspecific
Round 1	412	31	25	6	0
Round 2	496	96	84	5	7
Round 3	159	91	80	10	1
Total	1067	218	189	21	8
Percentage			86.7%	9.6%	3.7%

In summary, of all public comments with respect to the 2/4 lane question on US 50:

- 87% advocate for 4-lane evacuation route.
- 10% favor 2 through lanes plus center turning lane
- 4% are unclear.

The predominate factor for those supporting 4 lanes is the concern for safety, in particular emergency evacuation safety in the event of wildfire.

The predominate factor for those in support of 2 lanes is mixed for bike path and improved safety/accident reduction.

Across the board, turning safely for residents getting on and off the highway is a universal concern.

Many comments, though non-specific regarding through-lane numbers, strongly imply a 4-lane preference but are not counted as such for purposes of this analysis. For example:

Move bike lanes up hill.
No bike lanes, remember Caldor fire not possible.
Need shoulders for snow removal.
Is there a problem, not sure?
No bikes on 50.
Keep wide shoulders for cars experiencing problems.
No bike lanes on 50 concerned with evacuation...(sic)

NDOT's public comment pool is being enlarged as we speak with a broad and inexact public survey which appears to be designed to enlist far-flung public support for a vague and unspecified reconfiguration in the name of safety. In addition to being more conceptual than factual regarding the CMP itself, the new survey can be filled out multiple times by anyone anywhere with a link, leading to serious questions as to result validity and interpretation. One can only surmise that this last ditch, uncontrolled scramble for broad public response means that existing public comment from local residents is insufficient to supporting the desired CMP makeover.

As of early September, NDOT has now posted on their website/CMP lengthy Public Comment Summary & Log which interprets, extrapolates and packages "public comment" into bold bar charts and vibrant graphics to paint a picture of a future roadway that is more like the yellow brick road to Oz than a serious evacuation corridor. In fact, the word "evacuation" is not even included the report summary and representation of public sentiment. So much for "everyone is a stakeholder."

Dana Tibbitts: Dana is a team lead for Tahoe East Shore Alliance. In addition to her many years in marketing and communications for UCLA and many other public interest entities, she is co-author of *Harnessing the Sky: Frederick 'Trap' Trappell, the U.S. Navy's Aviation Pioneer*, published by the Naval Institute Press.