

Nevada County Transportation Commission

The Nevada County Transportation Commission (NCTC) is the Regional Transportation Planning Agency for Nevada County. NCTC coordinates state and federal transportation programs for Nevada County, the City of Grass Valley, Nevada City, and the Town of Truckee.

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Upcoming NCTC Meeting

The next meeting of the Nevada County Transportation Commission is scheduled on: **Wednesday, January 20, 2010 at 9:30 a.m., Nevada City Council Chambers, 317 Broad Street, Grass Valley, CA.**



NEVADA COUNTY TRANSPORTATION UPDATE

Issue 42

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La Barr Meadows Road Project Focused on Safety

The **SR 49/La Barr Meadows Road Intersection Improvement Project** is in the preconstruction phase with tree removal currently underway along the section of highway just north of Alta Sierra Drive. The project is designed to widen SR 49 to four lanes with eight foot shoulders. Left turn pockets are planned at a new intersection between the fire station and the church on the west side and north of Forest Springs Mobile Home Park on the east. Frontage roads will be built on both sides of the highway collecting driveways of houses and mobile home parks, and a traffic signal will be installed to eliminate dangerous ingress and egress on Highway 49. Many trees have been cut down to allow space for the additional lanes, shoulders, frontage roads, and sound walls to be placed along the highway. A diagram of the project can be seen on the Nevada County Transportation Commission (NCTC) website: <http://www.nctc.ca.gov/Projects/Current-Projects/index.html>



Tree removal on SR 49 just north of La Barr Meadows Road where the four lane highway and shoulders will be constructed.

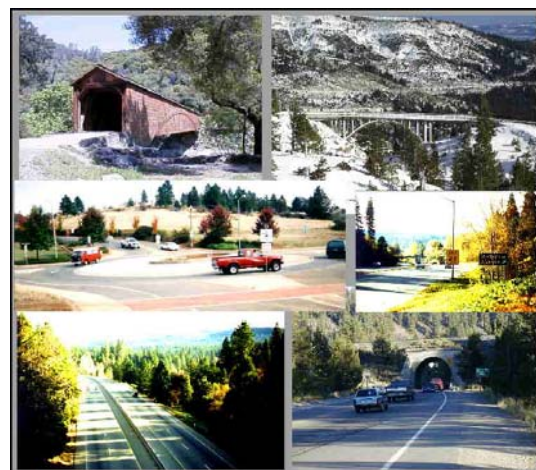
This section of SR 49 came under serious discussion at NCTC meetings in 2003. Penny Watson of Sierra Foothill Real Estate collected 527 names on a petition asking for a traffic light and possibly a reduction in the speed limit. Concerned citizens and NCTC Commissioners asked Caltrans to respond with suggested safety improvements; however, very little funding was available since accident statistics did not meet the criteria for the Caltrans State Highway Operations and Protection Program (SHOPP). Flashing lights were eventually installed warning drivers in both directions of potential traffic merging and slower moving vehicles. It was determined that the speed limit could not be lowered to 45 mph. More 55 mph signs were installed along the corridor. The California Highway Patrol (CHP) made a commitment to help with speed limit reinforcement, and mobile home park seniors were given

a class on safe driving techniques.

Tom Brannon, Caltrans District 3 Project Manager for Nevada County at the time, coordinated the task to create a work plan to widen SR 49 so the project could be included in the 2004 State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP). The federal government was requiring an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) be done on the entire stretch of highway from Wolf/Combie Road to McKnight Way in Grass Valley. That was later changed to require an EIR only on the project boundaries, since it could take many years to fund the widening of the entire corridor and the EIR would be outdated. In the 2004 STIP existing funds were reprogrammed to construct the widening of SR 49 in segments, with this location to be constructed first due to the numerous accidents and safety issues. *(continued on page 2)*

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La Barr Meadows Rd./SR 49 Continued

In April 2005 Caltrans held public workshops in south county, at Foothill Community Church, and at Ponderosa Pines Mobile Home Park to get the public's opinion on the design of the project. A Project Approval and Environmental Documentation (PA/ED) Report was created in 2006 to pinpoint more accurately the properties that would be directly impacted.

Caltrans told Nevada County that the project would have to be built in phases since there were not enough funds to build the full project. NCTC staff submitted the plans to the California Transportation Commission (CTC) in January 2007 as a Corridor Mobility Improvement Account (CMIA) project vying for Proposition 1B funding that was approved by the voters in November 2006 to support transportation projects throughout the state. On February 28, 2007 the CTC approved \$18.5 million to fund construction of the full project. Nevada County was one of only three rural counties in the state to be awarded Prop. 1B funding. With this type of funding the project must be kept on schedule and a Corridor System Management Plan (CSMP) is required to tie in future construction plans along the corridor.



Trees removed for highway expansion and a frontage road near Forest Springs Mobile Home Park

Right-of-Way appraisal maps were prepared in early 2008 and first written offers on properties started in May. Due to state budget issues in January 2009, Prop. 1B funds were temporarily frozen; however, there was funding in place to complete tasks up to construction. The project is currently waiting for Prop. 1B funds to be allocated for the construction portion of the project. NCTC is hoping the bond sale that took place in November will provide the funding necessary to allow the project to go out to bid and potentially start construction in the spring of 2010. The tree removal is scheduled to end by Christmas and then utilities like NID, PG&E, and AT&T will be moved to make way for construction. The state budget deficit will continue to be a factor in the timing of construction, and until the funds are awarded for the project, it is a "wait and see" situation. [NCTC](#)

Pedestrian Master Plan Planning Grant

NCTC has been awarded a Caltrans Community-Based Transportation Planning Grant in the amount of \$65,000 to develop a comprehensive countywide Pedestrian Master Plan. The objective of this planning effort is to develop a plan to assist the jurisdictions in implementing efficient transportation infrastructure investments that improve accessibility, reflect community values, foster livable communities, and promote walking as an alternative mode of transportation. Staff from the jurisdictions will be working in coordination with the consultant to inventory and identify potential locations for pedestrian improvement projects. This project will also include public workshops in eastern and western Nevada County to engage the public and stakeholders in the identification of locations where pedestrian infrastructure improvements are needed.

NCTC staff is currently working with members of the Technical Advisory Committee to refine the scope of work for this project. Once the scope of work is finalized, NCTC will distribute a Request for Proposals from qualified consulting firms in February 2010.

Western NV County TDP

NCTC has also been awarded a Federal Transit Administration (FTA) 5304 Transit Technical Planning Assistance Grant in the amount of \$30,000 to update the five-year Western Nevada County Transit Development Plan (WNCTDP). This study will include an analysis of a wide range of transit services, capital, institutional and management, and financial alternatives. Public workshops and outreach efforts will be held as part of this planning effort to receive input from passengers and stakeholders. The transit plan that is developed will identify a sustainable strategy for the provision of transit and paratransit services in western Nevada County.

The consulting firm, Transit Resource Center, has been selected to update the WNCTDP. This project will be concluded by June 2010. [NCTC](#)

CHP Enforcement Promotes Safety

The Grass Valley Safe Highway Coalition held a task force meeting on December 10th and reported on the California Highway Patrol (CHP) enforcement activities that have taken place on SR 49 between the Placer County line and McKnight Way since the one year grant program began on August 1, 2009. The \$210,000 grant is to be used in the Grass Valley area with the Grass Valley CHP as the lead agency. Sergeant Mike Lawrence is the Grant Coordinator and he compiled and presented some very impressive statistics. Officers are being deployed on grant-funded overtime along the corridor to enforce traffic regulations that are related to primary collision factors including speeding, drunk driving, not wearing seat belts, and human behaviors such as cell phone usage, applying makeup, and eating while driving.

Grant Goal #1: To maintain or reduce the number of fatalities on SR 49. **Goal #2:** To reduce the number of injured victims on SR 49. The first four months of the overtime enforcement activities (August through November 2009) saw an 82% reduction in injured victims. The grant overtime surveillance by officers from September 1st through November 30th resulted in 347 written speeding violations. In comparison, the "total number" of speeding violations written during that three month time frame was 545, which indicates 64% more tickets were written during overtime hours that would not have occurred without the special grant. The Grass Valley Police Department has recently received authorization to join with the CHP in this overtime enforcement effort on the northern portion of the SR 49 corridor through July 2010.



The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) website speaks specifically about the hazards of cellular phone use while driving. The "Policy Statement" says: "The primary responsibility of the driver is to operate a motor vehicle safely. The task of driving requires full attention and focus. Cell phone use can distract drivers from this task, risking harm to themselves and others. Therefore, the safest course of action is to refrain from using a cell phone while driving." Research shows that driving while using a cell phone can pose a serious cognitive distraction and degrade driver performance. Statistics indicate the following:

- *Distraction from cell phone use while driving (hand-held or hands-free) extends a driver's reaction time to as much as having a blood alcohol concentration at the legal limit of .08 percent. (University of Utah)
- The number one source of driver inattention is use of a wireless device. (Virginia Tech/NHTSA)
- Drivers that use cell phones are four times as likely to get into crashes serious enough to injure themselves. (NHTSA and Insurance Institute for Highway Safety)
- Ten percent of drivers aged 16 to 24 years old are on their phone at any one time.
- Driving while distracted is a factor in 25% of police reported crashes.
- Driving while using a cell phone reduces the amount of brain activity associated with driving by 37%. (Carnegie Mellon)
- <http://www.nationwide.com/newsroom/dwd-facts-figures.jsp> (link to NHTSA web data)



*<http://www.flickr.com/photos/cpurin1/3738634331/>



The available research indicates that whether it is a hands-free or hand-held cell phone, the cognitive distraction is significant enough to degrade a driver's performance. This can cause a driver to miss critical visual and audio cues needed to avoid a crash. Drivers should make every effort to move to a safe place off the road before using a cell phone. In a controlled study, comparing eating and operating a cell phone, to operating a CD player, it was found that the CD player operating was more distracting than the other activities. Manual phone dialing was found to be about as distracting as grooming and eating, but less distracting than reading or changing CDs.

Speeding is implicated in a greater proportion of fatal teen crashes compared with crashes involving drivers of other age groups. In 2005, 38% of fatal crashes involving 15 to 20 year old males at the wheel involved speeding. Another safety factor being tracked in the year-long grant is seat belt use. It is especially crucial for teenagers due to their high crash rate. Two-thirds of teen drivers and passengers killed in crashes were not wearing seat belts. By comparison, 48% of drivers and passengers ages 35 and up that were killed in crashes were not buckled up. [NCTC](#)