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Brian Head hails its new ski bridge

It links 2 main areas; resort also adds ski lifts and terrain

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Intermittent sunshine, flakes of snow and a brisk, cold wind greeted skiers and other people attending the much-anticipated inauguration Friday of a ski bridge at Brian Head Resort in Iron County.

The \$6.5 million interconnect system allows skiers to schuss their way over state Route 143 without ever having to remove their boots or stop for traffic. Two new triple chair lifts are easily accessed on either side of the ski bridge that divides Navajo and Giant Steps Mountains, the resort's two main ski mountains. The resort has also added 35 percent more terrain to play on.

"This has been a long time coming. We've talked about adding these new lifts for a few years, and the bridge has been talked about for even longer than that," said Ron Burgess of Brian Head Resort. "We won't have a sense of separation any longer."

The town of Brian Head contributed \$900,000 to the project. Brian Head Town Manager Bryce Haderlie said residents voted years ago to approve a \$900,000 general obligation bond that could be used to help build the ski bridge, but the bond may not be necessary. The town has created a Community Development Area that allows the town to take future property tax money from new growth and funnel it into recreation and tourism, Haderlie said.

Brian Head Resort officials agreed to take over construction of the bridge, a project town leaders had always wanted, if Brian Head would kick in the \$900,000, he added.

"Everyone came to the table and made this happen," Haderlie said. "The resort committed to be in charge of the construction of the bridge, which was a huge benefit to the town."

Brian Head Mayor "Dutch" Deutschlander said the private/public partnership is "one of the better deals the town has ever made."

The town's payments on its investment have, so far, been made out of its general fund, although the mayor said he is hopeful that sales and property taxes generated by new growth will repay the town coffers

"We may have to increase property taxes to help pay for it. That's always out in the wings," Deutschlander said. "But we're hoping we don't have to deal with that."

Proposed and approved developments already in the works could potentially double the town's assessed tax value, said the mayor, who has held an elected office in Brian Head since 1977.

"One of the challenges here for the town and staff is we go along catering to 100 residents or so, and then all of a sudden, boom, we grow to 6,000 people," the mayor said.

That jump in part-time residents would surge if every development project currently in the pipeline were constructed, as would the town's assessed value, doubling from its current value of \$234 million, Haderlie said.

Las Vegas developer Mike Jabara, whose Summit at Brian Head Resort would add anywhere from 454 residential units to 550 units, said his project will break ground next spring.

"This is the first master-planned community at Brian Head," Jabara said. "This town is going through the same transformation as other ski-resort towns in the West have done, like Park City did in the 1960s. It's moving from a rustic hometown experience to a more affluent, second-home destination. At the end of the day, however, this is still a pretty small community, and we hope to keep it that way. The future of this town is breathtaking."

Burgess said Brian Head Resort is also planning to build an Alpine ski village at the base of Giant Steps Mountain, adding restaurants and other unique retail shops to the area.

"We are bringing everything up to date, and when we put that base village in, this town is going to explode," he said. "This ski bridge is just the beginning of that growth."

Brian Head is about four hours south of Salt Lake City, just off I-15 on state Route 143. More information on the new ski bridge and ski runs can be found at brianhead.com.

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Brian Head Resort