

Report cites commuter savings

Trip-reduction efforts saved \$18.6 million in past five years

By DENISE FRANKLIN
Sentinel staff writer

SANTA CRUZ — Efforts to reduce traffic have saved commuters \$18.6 million over the past five years.

That's the word from Commute Solutions, the county agency whose job it is to help commuters find alternatives to driving alone to and from work.

Commuters who were aided in finding car pools, van pools or the bus saved 27 cents for each mile they didn't have to drive, explained Julie Millsap, program administration coordinator for Commute Solutions. The agency uses figures supplied by the state Department of Transportation to calculate savings.

The number of commuters saving money and having a less stressful commute is climbing, according to a recent report prepared by Millsap of Commute Solutions progress from 1990-91 through 1994-95.

In 1993-94, 947 commuters found alternatives to driving alone through Commute Solutions, and last year 807 commuters received help. That's compared to just 466 in 1992-93. The numbers are first-time clients of Commute Solutions, formerly known as Share-A-Ride.

Millsap credits the increase over the

past two years on "developing a niche with employers."

"We decided to do more with over-the-hill employers, as well as with local employers," Millsap said, explaining that most commuters the agency deals with are traveling over Highway 17 to jobs in the Santa Clara Valley and beyond.

Commute Solutions reached employers through its two annual promotions, Rideshare Week and a promotion that targets commuters on Highways 9 and 17, Millsap said.

The former state-mandated trip reduction program that required businesses to reduce the number of workers driving alone to work also did a lot to form contacts with employers. This mandate, however, was eliminated by the state Legislature in August.

But in 1993-94, when the trip reduction program was operating, Commute Solution had its highest number of applications in its 16-year history.

That year, employees throughout the county received surveys on their driving habits that came with applications from Commute Solutions. The agency received 4,800 applications, compared to the 1,500-1,700 in years past.

Even last year, applications were still up, with 2,650 received.

The increase in the number of commuters receiving help has occurred even though Commute Solutions' budget has stayed relatively the same over the past three years. In 1992-93 and 1993-94, the budget was \$198,000, and last year it rose to \$200,000.

Santa Cruz County Ridesharing 1990-1995



Applications processed	12,270
People placed	3,485
Reduced vehicle miles	68.9
Reduced fuel (gals.)	3,435,000
Reduced pollutants (lbs)	2,411,500
Reduced carbon dioxide (millions lbs)	65.455
Funds saved at 27c/mile	\$18,603,000

Source: Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation

Chris Carothers/Sentinel

This year, the budget was reduced to \$161,000 because of cut backs in federal money funneled to Commute Solutions

through Caltrans.

To reach Commute Solutions, call 429-POOL.