

TRAFFIC REPORT 1990 -

County's cure for congestion

Plans move ahead to reduce number of cars on the streets

By DENISE FRANKLIN
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SANTA CRUZ — Parents find child care near home or work, eliminating the extra miles to drop off and pick up the little ones.

Employees happily share rides to work, knowing that in an emergency, a cab will take them home at no charge.

Bicyclists pedal along a path paralleling the railroad tracks, unimpeded by cars.

And all in all, traffic moves more smoothly throughout the county.

That's the future envisioned in the so-called "congestion management program" put together by the county Regional Transportation Commission. The final draft is available for public comment through Aug. 17.

Santa Cruz County isn't the only place coming up with a program to ease congestion on the highway. Passage of Proposition 111 in June

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1990 required all counties with an urbanized area of more than 50,000 people to adopt such a program by 1993.

Much of the work of reducing highway congestion in the county will be in the hands of local governments, which will have to pass what transportation officials call "trip-reduction ordinances." In other words, laws designed to encourage fewer trips by car and thus reduce the amount of traffic on the road.

The commission is working on a model ordinance to be used as a

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Linda Beauchesne works at the health center, right, and her kids go to the day care at left.

Day care close to the office

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SANTA CRUZ — When the Emeline Child Care Center opens in September, Linda Beauchesne will no longer have to drive 26 extra miles a day to pick up her kids at day care.

The center, located in the Emeline Street complex of county Health Services Agency buildings, is an example of the types of programs envisioned in the final draft of the county's congestion management program.

The policy on child-care facilities is a late addition to the final draft. It states that local governments should "encourage land-use policies which locate child care facilities with or near new residential and employment centers."

Beauchesne, a part-time pro-

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guide by local governments, although officials can make changes to suit the community.

The model ordinance would require employers with more than 50 workers to get 40 percent of employees to quit driving alone to work.

A survey on how many businesses in the county with that many employees was not immediately available, but a spokesman for the Santa Cruz Area Chamber of Commerce said only about 25-30 of the organization's more than 1,000 members would fall into that category.

Other large employers in the county include the University of California Santa Cruz, Cabrillo College in Aptos, and county and city governments.

"Businesses need to get going now before they are under the gun, before the trip-reduction ordinance regulations are in place, because it does take time to get employees and regulations together," said Tegan Speiser of the Transportation Management Association.

The association was put together a year ago by the Santa Cruz Area Chamber of Commerce to help employers encourage workers to stop driving alone to work.

Businesses, government agencies and environmental groups have offered input as the transportation commission drafted the county's congestion management program.

The final draft proposes many new ways to ease congestion, but also is less restrictive in some areas than earlier versions.

For example, it contains new requirements for bike paths, but delays the deadline for trip-reduction ordinances from January to March

or later.

The commission felt it was better to put off those ordinances until the Monterey Bay Unified Air Pollution Control District, which covers Santa Cruz County, comes out with pollution regulations. That way, the ordinances will conform with the new regulations, said commission spokeswoman Pat Dellin.

The commission also set a less ambitious goal in terms of cutting down the number of vehicles being driven during the peak commute period.

Early drafts called for achieving an average of 1.5 persons per vehicle.

The final draft says communities should aim for an average of 1.35 people per vehicle traveling from 6-10 a.m. to sites regulated by the ordinances.

This would mean about 40 percent of a company's work force using alternative means of transportation to get to their jobs.

One business who objected to the 1.5-person goal was Seagate, a hard disk drive manufacturer in Scotts Valley with 1,430 employees.

Jeff Nelson, Seagate's director of facilities and real estate, said he thinks even the 1.35-person goal will be hard to achieve. But his company is supporting the goal as a member of the Transportation Management Association, he said.

"If we were in a high-density population with a grid work of streets like LA, the 1.5 goal might be achievable. But with our particular demographics, with rural areas and people spread out, 1.35 will be hard to obtain," he said.

Not so for Silicon Systems, a semi-conductor chip manufacturer in west Santa Cruz with 384 employees.

Through a ride-share program

started in January, it reached an average 1.38 employees per vehicle in June, according to Dorothy Garofalo, who heads the program.

Over the past year, the transportation commission has been taking comments from local businesses, local governments and environmental groups.

"The commission has taken two conflicting objectives and has done a good job of balancing them — environmental protection and facing economic realities," said Dellin.

"There is a recession going on. Businesses are hurting for money and local governments also are having a tough time, and those are the two implementing agencies for all these policies," she noted.

But reducing traffic congestion doesn't have to be costly, Dellin said, citing two low-cost programs: striping for bike lanes and providing bus passes for employees.

Local governments, large businesses, Cabrillo College, and UCSC are all targeted to ease the grid lock.

The program even has some bite. Any local jurisdiction that fails to abide by the program can be turned into the state controller by the transportation commission. The controller can withhold gas tax revenues.

Large employers, in turn, could be fined by local governments.

But while the model ordinance would allow local governments to fine employers, it is aimed at encouraging employers, not penalizing them, Dellin said.

To obtain a copy of the final draft of the congestion management program, call 425-2788. A public hearing is set for 9 a.m. Aug. 6 at Scotts Valley City Hall, 1 Civic Center Drive.

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Day care

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grammer in the county Mental Health Department on Emeline Street, has registered her two children at the new center.

"It is going to cost me a little bit more, but it will save me on gas and time," she said. "It takes me an extra 25 minutes in the morning now and a little bit more in the afternoon to pick up my kids."

Beauchesne and her husband live in Pasatiempo, but their two daughters are cared for in separate locations in Scotts Valley, which is

in the opposite direction from where Beauchesne works.

In the morning, her husband takes 20-month-old Jessica to a private home on his way to work in the Santa Clara Valley, but Beauchesne must drop off 4-year-old Allison at preschool.

This morning trip adds 12 miles to Beauchesne's commute. In the afternoon, she must pick up both daughters, adding another 14 miles.

Working three days a week, Beauchesne drives 78 extra miles weekly because child care isn't lo-

cated near her job.

The Emeline Child Care Center is designed mainly for county employees. The county is providing the building at a low cost.

The center will start with 15 preschool children and 8 toddlers. There will be three openings for the community at large.

The center, which will be opened year-round from 7:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. weekdays, also plans to have space for infants within the next six months.

For more information about the child-care center, call 459-8866.