

# County study finds fewer cars, more traffic

About 80 percent of all vehicles on county roads carry only the driver, report says

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**SANTA CRUZ** — The number of vehicles registered in Santa Cruz County went down last year but traffic increased on most roads and highways.

About 80 percent of the vehicles on the road carried only the driver.

It means people are relying on their cars more and more despite fairly heavy use of alternative transportation, according to a 48-page report by the Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission.

The annual report, released Thursday, details county traffic patterns, accidents rates and other transportation tidbits.

"I would say it continues a trend we've been seeing over the years, but trends that aren't necessarily going in the right direction," said Linda Wilshusen, executive director of the commission. "If this report confirmed anything, it confirmed that people are driving more."

The study shows that 41st Avenue in Capitola is the county's most heavily traveled street with 45,240 vehicles a day even though that number dropped 2,000 from the previous year.

Highway 1 remained the most heavily traveled highway, with more than 100,000 vehicles using the stretch between Soquel Avenue and Morrissey Boulevard each day, up about 4,000 from the year before.

Traffic also increased on other busy roads, including Mount Hermon Road north of Scotts Valley, Freedom Boulevard in Watsonville and Soquel Avenue in Santa Cruz.

However, the number of vehicles registered in the county decreased to 183,966, down 4 percent, which suggests more commuters are driving into the county or people living here are driving more.

The report says the most accident-prone stretch of pavement, for six years running, is Mission Street, between Chestnut Avenue and Bay Street. The study found 32.5 injury accidents per mile, up from 27.5 the year before.

The Santa Cruz City Council Wednesday night approved the Mission Street widening project, which means the state Department of Transportation could begin adding two lanes to the two-lane thoroughfare by August.

## Traffic tidbits

- On Highway 17, 83 percent of vehicles are occupied by one person.
- The heaviest traffic on the UC Santa Cruz campus is at Coolidge Drive, at 13,267 daily trips, followed by Heller and McLaughlin drives at 7,892 and 5,532.
- The highest daily traffic on Highway 1 is from Morrissey Boulevard to the Highway 17 interchange at 96,600 trips.
- In Capitola, the highest daily traffic is on 41st Avenue north of Clares Street, at 45,240 trips.
- In Scotts Valley, the highest daily traffic is on Mt. Hermon Road, between Whispering Pines and Lockwood roads, at 39,829 trips.
- In Aptos, the highest daily traffic is on State Park Drive near Highway 1, at 24,851 trips.
- In Watsonville, the highest daily traffic is on Freedom Boulevard near Green Valley Road, at 29,334 trips.

*Source: Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission*

While there are no easy answers to solving the region's traffic problems, Wilshusen said there are plans.

Late last year, the commission voted to construct merge lanes at the Highways 1/17 interchange to relieve traffic congestion during rush hour. And in the next few months the commission will tackle the controversial task of how to relieve congestion along Highway 1, which could include a heavy price tag for either rail service or highway widening.

Less expensive plans include more

Highway 1 and 17 message signs to warn drivers of problems, and live television monitoring.

"We are beginning to make technology more useful and to do even more for drivers," Wilshusen said. "And I think we'll be doing more and more of that."

The study also points out some good news in transportation trends, including more use of transportation services for the disabled and a 15 percent increase in bus use over the past five years.