

# Local

## Business concerns over proposed trip-limit laws aired

By CHELA ZABIN  
STAFF WRITER

The onus of a plan to control automobile emissions will fall on local businesses, a speaker at a Pajaro Valley Chamber of Commerce member said yesterday.

Jeff Nelson, the director of corporate facilities and real estate for Seagate Technology, said he doesn't have a problem with the intent of the plan, which is mandated by state law.

"The net result of this is going to help employers," he said, "A lot of us are here because of the environment ... The question is whether it kills any companies on the way."

Nelson was talking about the Congestion Management Plan, which is being prepared by the Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission. The plan is required by Proposition 111, which was approved by state

voters in 1990, and raised gasoline tax to pay for transportation projects. Santa Cruz County has to adopt the plan because it has exceeded the air-pollution levels allowed by the state a number of times over the last several years.

One element of the plan is a trip-reduction ordinance, which would require employers to reduce their employees' driving.

The transportation commission is working on a model ordinance, which will have to be adopted by the county and the cities. A trip-reduction ordinance will also be adopted by the regional Air Quality Control Board, and the local ordinances must be at least as strict as the one adopted by the air board.

Nelson said that although government has the mandate to reduce emissions, it doesn't have a way to implement it on its own.

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use, he said. That does make some sense, he said, since large groups of people can be reached through employers. But businesses aren't just being seen as "helpers and brokers," he said. They will face fines and penalties if they don't carry out the programs.

Nelson called for government agencies to shoulder some of the burden — to be responsible, for example, for creating and maintaining public transportation systems and bike lanes so people

have a viable alternative to driving. He said it was frustrating that the money raised through the gas taxes couldn't be used to help pay for trip-reduction programs. It can only be used for capital improvements.

The ordinance is still being drafted, and isn't yet available for comment, Nelson said. He talked about what the ordinance is likely to address, based on what commission staff members have said.

The ordinance could go one of two ways, Nelson said: It could

require certain actions, or it could require a certain level of driving reduction. Mostly likely more would be required of larger employers than smaller ones.

Employers might be required to have a traffic management coordinator, conduct annual surveys, subsidize bus passes, create preferential parking for people who car pool, charge for parking and restrict the number of parking spaces. Employers may be given a choice of actions they will take.

The ordinance could also set up "performance bases," which might require employers to achieve an average of 1.5 people per car. That figure, he said, is likely to be on the higher end.

Nelson said employers in Los Angeles are figuring a cost of \$3 per day per employee to implement the new rules. That kind of cost will be difficult for many businesses to bear, and, he said, could

discourage businesses from locating in areas that have them.

Other costs to businesses will include fines and penalties, the cost of setting up and monitoring the programs and, most likely, some increase in fees or taxes to help cities and counties cover the costs of monitoring the Congestion Management Plan.

Nelson encouraged business owners to get together in their chambers of commerce and other agencies to study the plan and make sure their comments are heard by the Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission. He said copies of the current draft (Draft 2) are available by calling the commission.

The deadline for public comment on the congestion management plan as a whole has been extended to April 2, when a public hearing will be held at 8:30 a.m. in the County Board of Supervisor's chambers in Santa Cruz.