

Live Oak Beach Parking Program Getting Mixed Reviews

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Whether you're for or against the month-old Live Oak beach parking program depends on your perspective — whether you live near the beach or away from it.

Residents near the beach who had problems before even getting in and out of their driveways because of summer beach traffic are all for the program which regulates on-street parking. On the other hand, residents on the outskirts of the half-mile deep restricted parking area, as well as merchants and state parks people, don't like it.

Beach-goers, who are getting hit with \$25 fines for parking without permits on the streets during the day, especially don't like it. Even the county, which is adding some \$2,500 a day to its general fund from the average 100 citations that are being issued, is disappointed the public hasn't taken to the program.

The two-year, federally-funded, experimental program regulates on-street

parking along the coast from the Santa Cruz Small Craft Harbor to 41st Avenue, up to a half-mile inland. Designed to remove up to 600 cars per day from crowded beach streets, a free "park and ride" beach shuttle is operating from two county-owned lots in Live Oak. The program will run through Sept. 15.

That will be much too long for some.

Chief Ranger Larry Cermak of the state's Pajaro Coast Area office estimated usage at Twin Lakes State Beach as being "at least 30 percent down and possibly considerably more" — all due to the parking program.

He pointed to the fact that attendance on the Santa Cruz city side of Twin Lakes, where there are no parking restrictions, is much greater than the Live Oak side. Beaches at Seabright, Manresa and Rio del Mar are also getting heavier than normal use.

Cermak says he's still hoping the public will accept the program, but admits he is fearful "people just aren't willing to accept the concept of parking their car away from the beach."

Meanwhile, merchants at both the yacht harbor and East Cliff Village also say business has slacked off.

"It's not just me, it's everybody," said an angry Gary Colbert of Tom's Fisherman's Supply at the yacht harbor. "Overall, I'm down at least 35 percent. Everything was okay until it started. Then, it was like somebody pulled the plug."

Chuck Lindberg, owner of East Cliff Village Crown drug store, concurred that the program is "really hurting business." He estimated business down between 35 and 50 percent.

Other merchants in East Cliff Village shopping center are unhappy that its parking lot has been too enticing for some beach-goers to pass up. Tow-away signs have since been installed, added Lindberg, but the problem of enforcement may add more costs.

Not everyone, however, is so staunchly against the program. Residents near the beach love it.

"I used to worry that if I leave the house would I have a parking space when I got back," said 12th Avenue resident Sophia Miller. "It would be murder without this program."

Added Robbe Hester, "I love it and it's definitely helping a lot."

Parking enforcement officer Ronnie Besase has heard nothing but compliments from residents. "I would say 99.9 percent of them are extremely positive," she said. "I've had so many people come up to me and say it's such a joy to be able to park in front of their house again."

While program coordinator Neil McLaughlin praises the program and agrees that "residents are terribly enthusiastic," he admits "there are a lot of rough edges and modifications to make."

Any changes, though, are in a holding

pattern now, he added, since federal officials will be coming to the area this week to do a detailed program evaluation.

That study will involve aerial photographs, traffic car counts and resident and beach surveys of several hundred people. Results will be compared to a similar evaluation done in 1978 that was used to institute the program. The evaluation is expected to take three weeks to complete.

McLaughlin is the first to admit, though, that he is disappointed with some aspects of the program — like the low ridership of only some 242 persons a day on the shuttle buses and the high average of 100 citations a day being issued to motorists who park illegally.

The number of shuttle bus riders is much lower than anticipated. The 17th Avenue lot, for example, was designed for 600 cars. The most it has ever held is 65 cars, said McLaughlin.

Making the shuttle enticing to beach-goers remains a primary goal. One of the shuttle's drawbacks up to now has been the difficulty for beach-goers to get all their beach gear onto the buses.

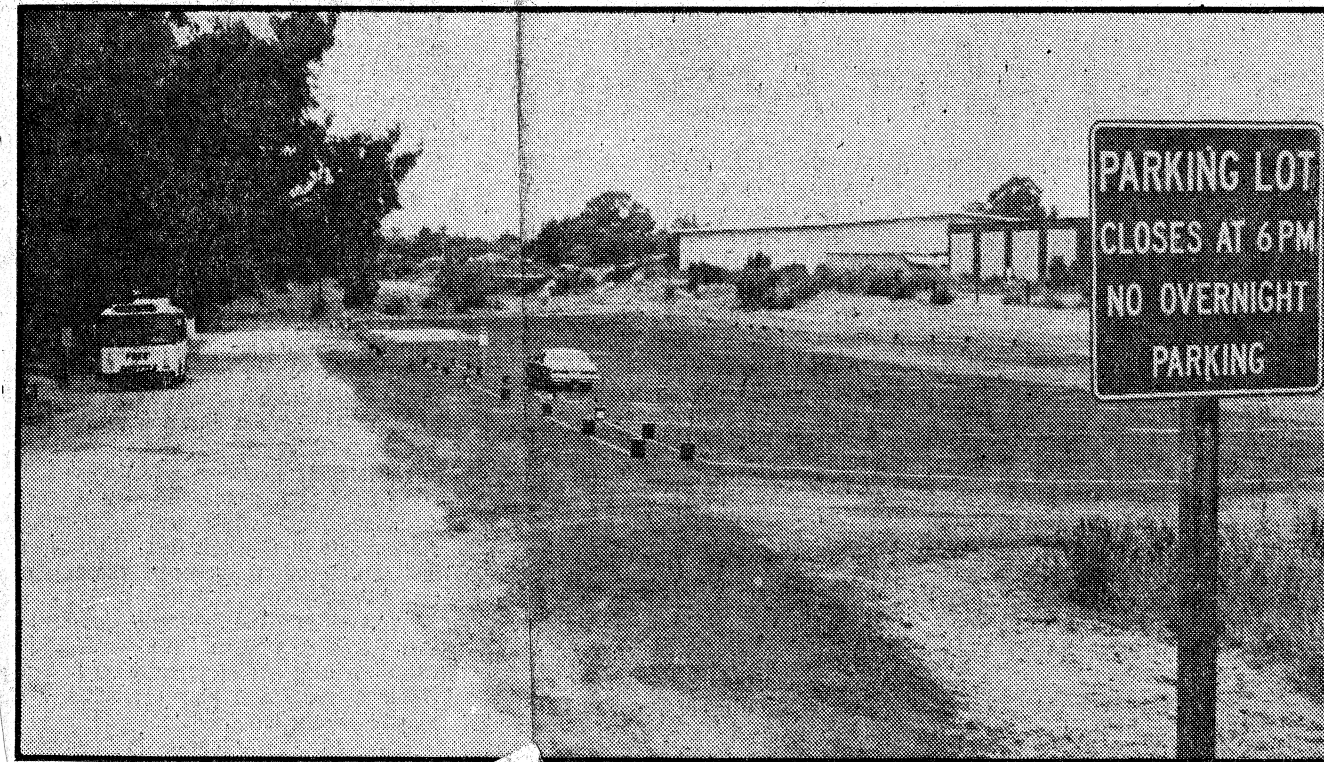
McLaughlin said there has been some discussion about the possibility of installing surfboard racks on buses to accommodate surfers, as well.

Citations, which were expected to drop once visitors became familiar with the program, have remained constant at 100 a day, keeping the parking enforcement officers busy.

First (Live Oak) District Supervisor Dan Forbus told The Sentinel that out of 38 complaints to his office, sentiment appears to be split in half concerning the program.

Like McLaughlin, he is taking a wait-and-see attitude until the federal evaluation team makes its recommendations.

Hopefully, that team will be made up of an uneven number of persons — or else they may split on the program, too.



Shuttle bus passengers at virtually-empty parking lot

Pete Amos/Sentinel