

PEDAL POWER

DAVID ALEXANDER

Local Cyclists Push for Better Bikeways



Some people ride to work. Others, like Jerry the Barber, take their work along for the ride.

Three mornings a week, Greg Branch, vice president of Branch & Lenker Engineering, Inc., bypasses his car, hops on his bike and rides from 44th Ave. in Capitola to his business on Walnut Avenue in Santa Cruz.

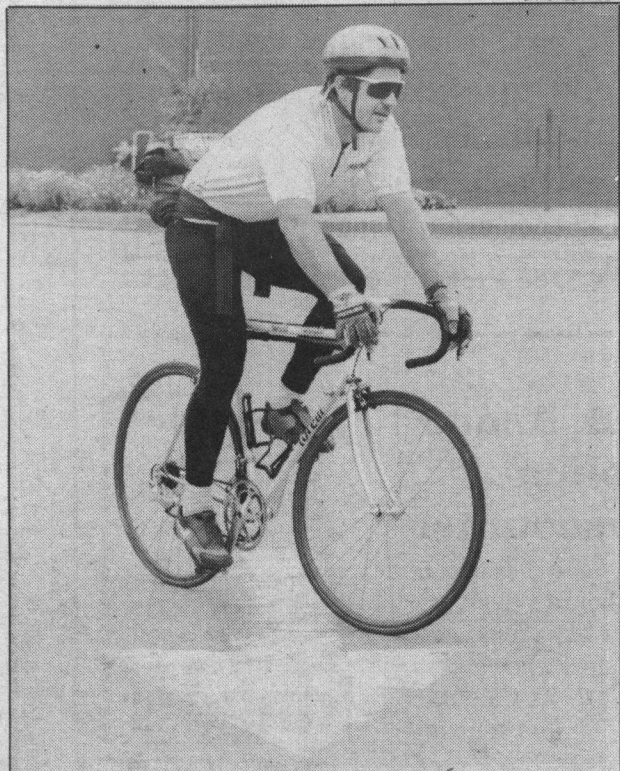
Kristen Anderson, who doesn't have a car, makes her daily commute by bike from her home on Ocean View Drive to her job at Greenpeace on Ocean Street.

And Kevin Karplus, an assistant professor of computer engineering at UCSC, leaves his Westside home each morning and rides his bike three miles up Bay Street to the university.

by Julie Vallone

Growing numbers of county commuters are leaving their cars at home (or getting rid of them completely) and turning to pedal power to get them rolling each morning. Ask them why, and they'll cite a number of reasons, from saving the planet to saving their bodies. But almost all agree that more people would follow

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Tim Durkee rides slightly off course at the Farmer's Market.

their lead if the county were a safer, more convenient place to ride.

"It's a little dangerous," says Branch of his six mile ride. "Sometimes, when there are no bike lanes, I have to ride on the sidewalk where there are few pedestrians. I'd be in favor of more bikepaths and government incentives for people who ride."

"There would be a lot more people riding their bicycles if they felt safer on the road," says Piet Canin, a local cyclist who works for Ecology Action. "It's scary riding your bike in traffic."

While those who commute by car often complain that cyclists disregard traffic rules, Canin and others believe that road conditions force cyclists into potentially dangerous situations.

"There is a problem that the roads are not made for cyclists," says Canin. "Lights are not being tripped for cyclists and there's not enough room on the shoulders. All the dirt from the middle of the road is swept to the side, where cyclists have to ride, and when we try to avoid it, we end up moving toward a car and jeopardizing our safety."

While these infrastructural problems discourage cyclists, Canin says the city and county are working on improving the situation.

One recent victory for local cyclists took place at the Santa Cruz City Council's May 5 meeting, where council members unanimously supported a Broadway-Brommer connection, around the upper edge of the Yacht Harbor, to be used by cyclists and pedestrians only. The bikeway, which would connect the Eastside and Westside of the city, represents a positive step toward creating a complete bike network throughout Santa Cruz.

According to Jessica Denevan, co-founder of the bicycle advocacy group, People Power, the Broadway-Brommer connection was originally a plan to build a connection for automobiles. But local cyclists and other community members who attended a Public Works planning meeting last fall unanimously spoke out against the automobile project, and in favor of a biped connection.

"They were going ahead with the same conventional way of dealing with too much traffic [by expanding the roads for cars], and we said no, we need to have the money directed to alternatives instead," she explains.

Denevan and her husband, Jim, got rid of their car in 1989, and now use bikes for almost all their transportation needs. She believes that cars actually alienate people from their community because they're closed off, making it unnecessary to interact with others during a commute. Building cities around the convenience of automobiles has further contributed to this segmenting of society.

"People have become aware of all the problems with the auto system," she says, "not just the environmental problems, but the social problems, too."

Denevan and others believe that the recent push in favor of bike improvements is, in part, a reaction to years of developing cities for cars, rather than for people.

As in the Broadway-Brommer decision, other moves toward creating a network will require the community to choose between the convenience of motorists and that of cyclists and pedestrians when planning city development.

In an effort to reduce traffic congestion and improve the air quality, local businesses and other community agencies have been looking at ways to encourage alternative forms of commuting. These will inevitably involve sacrifices on the part of those who use cars.

"Parking has got to be paid for by the people who use it," says Karplus (yes, that's really his name), who serves as chairperson of the Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission bicycle committee. Karplus adds that recent studies have shown a sharp rise in the number of those commuting to the university by bike over the past year.

"Parking management has been extremely effective in reducing car usage. That's how UCSC has gotten such an extreme increase in alternative commuting," he says.

People Power activist Don Fong believes the city and county should provide greater incentives for cycling, such as safer lanes, biker sensitive traffic lights, and more bicycle parking. He says they should also discourage driving with such measures as a gas tax and elimination of free parking.

"If the city wants people to make a large percentage of trips by bike, it must be willing to spend a large percentage of the transportation (budget) on bikes," he says. "The city needs to make a commitment to start putting the safety of cyclists ahead of the convenience of motorists."

But making such a commitment isn't as easy as it sounds.

"People are addicted to the convenience and power of the automobile. People think of bikes as toys and cars as transportation," says Fong.

Rick Hyman, member of the county bicycle advisory committee and historian for the Santa Cruz County Cycling Club, says that while there have been some recent improvements in the

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People Power founders Jessica and Jim Denevan gave up on cars in 1989.

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cycling climate, there must be an even greater push towards creating a complete bikeway network. He says many of the bike lanes in the city of Santa Cruz date back to 1981.

"Basically, when the city did its bikeway plan, they mainly proposed bike lanes on streets that were wide enough to put bike lanes on. It simply involved striping, not widening," he explains. "What the plan didn't do was provide a complete network of bike lanes. The projects that are left to do are harder and more controversial and cost more money."

Hyman says that the county's attention to developing a bikeway system has been more measured over time, with one or two projects a year.

Jack Witthaus, bicycle coordinator for the County Transportation Commission, cites several bike projects that have been in the works over the past couple of years, including the widening of Soquel Drive in the Rancho Del Mar Area, construction projects along San Andreas Road, Brommer Street and Empire Grade, and the striping of bike lanes along several streets in Watsonville.

Hyman credits the recent push in favor of these bike projects with a heightened awareness of the benefits of biking to the community.

"The formation of People Power as an advocacy and lobbying group is a strong indication that cyclists in

Santa Cruz are very concerned about being able to ride," he says.

According to Santa Cruz City traffic engineer Ray Chong, commitment to biking is a start. Finding the money is another problem.

"What it takes is the policymakers deciding how much money they want to commit to these bike improvements and how much state funding should be allocated to these projects. There is also a lot of competition among bike projects," he says.

'People have become aware of all the problems with the auto system, not just the environmental problems, but the social problems, too.'

Chong pointed to a fund started last year through the Clean Air and Transportation Improvement Act as one source for bicycle improvements.

But he also cites the problem of space.

"It's a trade off between [car] parking and biking needs. That's the key problem in the city. It's not like a brand new town where you can build anything you want," he says.

But most cycling advocates and planners believe that once people start becoming less dependent on cars and using bikes at least for those shorter trips and errands, support for better bikeways will grow.

In an attempt to wean larger numbers of local drivers off their cars and get them onto their bikes, county businesses are sponsoring the fifth annual Bike to Work Day on Tuesday, May 19. The event features free breakfast for riders at several locations, awards to businesses for employee participation, and a Bike-Away-From Work celebration.

"This will hopefully get people who normally drive cars to work or to do chores around town to bike this one day and to discover the benefits of biking instead of driving," says Canin, who acts as an advisor for Bike to Work.

Kristen Anderson, this year's Bike-to-Work coordinator, expects a turnout of 2,000 for the event, adding that last year's turnout of around 1300 was nearly double that of the

previous year.

"This is the fun way to solve our transportation problems: throw a party," she says.

The fifth Annual Bike to Work Day takes place on May 19. Free breakfast is offered from 6:30 to 9:30 a.m. at the Santa Cruz Civic, West Marine in Watsonville, The Bike Rack in Scotts Valley, the UCSC Student Center and Cabrillo College. Bike Away From Work Celebrations take place from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. at Mission Plaza in Santa Cruz and Town Plaza in Watsonville. For additional information, call Kristen Anderson at 457-8976.

Biking the County

You say you'd just love to go biking, but there are no good places to ride. Well, enough of your sorry excuses. Here's a list of local bike trails to get you off of the couch and out in the fresh air:

- **Highway 1 to Davenport** — This 11-mile ride along the Pacific Coast Highway is mostly flat until just before Davenport.

- **UC Santa Cruz** — There is a two-lane path going up to the campus and back down again. The uphill path begins on High Street, follows Red Hills Road, through the meadows and ends just below the Performing Arts Complex.

- **West Cliff Drive** — This is the most popular paved bike path in Santa Cruz. It is a four mile, flat and gentle ride from the Lighthouse to Natural Bridges State Beach.

- **Santa Cruz Harbor** — There's a bike path that runs along the back of the harbor, beginning at Atlantic Avenue. This path takes you from the west side of the harbor to the east.

- **East Cliff Drive to Capitola** — Also known as the "Sea-Tree Tour," this ride is full of rolling hills and runs past several beaches along East Cliff from the east side of the Yacht Harbor to Capitola.

- **Soquel** — A trail from Sam Point in Nisene Marks leads down to Soquel Village by way of Old San Jose Road.

- **Aptos** — Nisene Marks public park is good for mountain biking on single track and fire roads. There are a lot of single track trails next to the fire road. For a good 20-mile ride round trip, go up to Sam Point. The main entrance to Nisene Marks is off Soquel Drive in Aptos Village, right across from Exxon.

- **Scotts Valley** — Henry Cowell Park and DeLaveaga Park have several dirt trails. The ranger station will give you a riding map.

- **San Lorenzo River Levee** — Use Water Street bridge or the pedestrian bridge between Soquel Drive and Water Street to get to the bike path that runs parallel to Front Street and Pacific Avenue.

- **Watsonville** — For an eight to nine mile ride along the Pajaro River levee, start up at East Lake and Holohan Avenues. Go through Watsonville down to the levee at Pajaro Dunes. Follow it down to the ocean.

Call the local parks and recreation departments for more detailed information.

—Jennifer Ruggles