

The Hitchhiking Issue

We would like to hope that there could be an honest compromise on the issue of banning hitchhiking in Santa Cruz.

It involves a wide segment of contrary conditions.

There is no question that when hitchhikers congregate near a roadway, especially at a busy intersection, there is a safety problem, involving both the hitchhiker and the motorist.

When a car stops, especially if there isn't room for the automobile to get completely off the roadway, there is the danger of a rear-end collision with another vehicle. There is the problem of sudden movement which can throw a car out of control.

The crime reports also show the evidence of dangers both to hitchhikers and to motorists who give rides to strangers.

But when an individual stays out of the roadway and doesn't endanger himself or others, we seriously question if he should be judged a hitchhiker even though he may be looking for a ride.

In a letter to the editor Max Levin of Crown College raises some good points this week. He writes . . . "But the youth of today include as well a considerable number of peaceful, generous and gentle persons and as concerned as any generations of Americans has ever been with their fellow men and a better America.

Some of the social problems they present — especially when in large groups — are often the consequences of their unmet needs by society.

"Youth will — and needs to — travel, explore their country, be on their own to achieve independence and maturity. In earlier days in America, boys would go to sea or to the frontier as early as fourteen. But such opportunities are scarce now as the summer jobs at home. What are they to do with their summers?"

He goes on to state "We should be planning inexpensive public transportation, bicycle and walking trails with shelters en route, instead of prohibiting hitchhiking. We should have travel aid stations, and special camping facilities for youth."

We agree that we really have made it difficult to travel without a vehicle.

The freeways are for trucks and automobiles. They are not for pedestrians or bicyclists.

We haven't even done a good job of providing pedestrian facilities in our cities as many streets are without sidewalks so it becomes difficult or dangerous to take an evening stroll.

In this regard, however, we have the unfortunate conflicting circumstances that the rising crime rate has endangered our ability to walk alone in the evening. And that it would appear that much of the

crime rate may be due to young transients who disregard the welfare of others.

Nevertheless, we do agree that we would like to see greater effort for riding and hiking trails so that both the young and old may travel beyond the confines of their community in safety.

At one time there were shelters for children to wait for a bus or for a ride, but unfortunately, even these shelters seem to fall prey to vandals.

If you are talking about hiking or cycling from city-to-city the problem gets even more acute except in rare areas. It is difficult, even dangerous to walk from Santa Cruz to Boulder Creek when there is any traffic on the road.

Just to make the situation even more contrary, some of those folks who defend hitchhiking are in the forefront of attempts to reduce the use of automobiles, a project which would effectively eliminate hitchhiking.

And the main thoroughfares to the center of the UCSC campus such as Glenn Coolidge drive, Hagar drive or Heller drive do not provide an area for either pedestrians or cyclists so that walking from the High street entrance to any college becomes no mean feat.

There are no simple solutions, for safety or for costs, but the freedom to travel should be given serious consideration, regardless of the mode.