

Air Travel: 'Air You Going My Way?'

Status Boost Sought For Hitchhikers

By Sam Benowitz

A large thumb would help any hitchhiker.

Or would it?

If Scott Smith has his way, large thumbs soon will be decorating the roads of Santa Cruz County.

The picture of a thumb would appear on road signs designating stations where motorists could pull over safely to pick up hitchhikers. Hitchhikers could sit by the sign in an open-sided hut to wait for a ride.

Smith is chairman of the county youth commission, which will bring the idea to the attention of the county board of supervisors at its meeting on Tuesday.

For many Santa Cruz residents, hitchhikers are either people who need a lift or bums who should be kicked out of the county.

Aware of this divergence of views, the commission is working to make hitchhiking "more respectable."

"For many older people," Smith said, "hitchhiking has a bad name, but it is a major form of transportation for kids in this county."

"Hitchhiking stations would lessen the traffic problems that hitchhiking causes and keep kids from trying to hitchhike on the freeway, which is illegal."

"The purpose of the stations is not to limit hitchhiking, but to encourage it."

The youth commission, established by the supervisors to study topics of concern to youth, includes two members from each high school in the county. Smith is from Watsonville High.

The commission will request the board to work with the city councils of the county to establish the—stations.

Some residents are in favor of the stations, but some are against them.

Captain Hartley Calhoun of the California Highway Patrol is opposed to the stations. Said Calhoun, "As far as I'm concerned, hitchhikers are begging transients and they won't get any comfort from me. Personally, I would like to take them all into custody and cite them for being a public nuisance."

Laura Bennett and Tod Decker are hitchhikers and UCSC students. But they're against the idea of stations, too.

"I don't see what problems they'd solve for the drivers or the kids," Miss Bennett said. She asked, "Where could the stations be located that would make it easier for cars to pull over? Besides, if the board has a chance, they may use the station idea as an opportunity to limit hitchhiking."

Said Decker, "I see hitchhiking as an informal thing. I would be against the stations because I like to think guys are giving me a ride because they want to help me, not because I'm at the official place."

Cathy Santoriello is a hitchhiking Santa Cruz telephone operator. She feels that the stations would be impractical because hitchhikers "don't stand in one place if they can't get a ride; they walk towards their destinations."

Peter Lawton, a UCSC motorist, who often doubles as a hitchhiker, favors the stations. "It is often difficult and dan-

gerous to stop—for hitchhikers and the stations would improve safety," he said.

Krisen Lane, a UCSC student, who often "hitches" to and from campus, favors the stations because she feels they would help hitchhikers in getting rides.

Lt. McKinley Reed of the traffic division of the Santa Cruz City Police, stated, "Hitchhiking often creates traffic problems when a car stops in a traffic lane to pick up the pedestrian."

"Hitchhiking stations off the roadway clearly marked so that motorists would know where to pick up hitchhikers might curtail the chance of highway injuries."

He added that hitchhikers must stay on the sidewalk. Being on the road is illegal.

Captain Calhoun also was concerned about safety. "When hitchhikers stand on the freeway this is unlawful and creates a hazard. We cite hitchhikers on the freeway even if they don't have their thumb out; and we also cite the stupid motorists who stop to pick them up," said Calhoun.

He added, "I don't now consider hitchhiking to be a serious problem, but it is annoying and makes for a serious accident potential."

"At Bay and Mission, at the interchange off Mission between Highways 1 and 17, and on the ramps, are the places where hitchhikers cause the greatest traffic problems."

Calhoun also indicated that he was concerned for the safety of young girl hitchhikers, a thought echoed by Officer Donna Haley of the SCPD Juvenile Department.

Said Officer Haley, "During Easter Week, the law enforcement agencies of the county picked up 40 to 50 kids under the age of 18 for hitchhiking."

She explained that hitchhiking is one of many activities interpreted to be illegal for people under 18 by Section 601 of the State Welfare and Institutions Code. Youngsters are picked up for being "in danger of leading an idle, lewd, immoral or dissolute life."

"About 40 kids hitchhike home from Watsonville High every evening," says Scott Smith. "It is just a matter of the kids not having a car. Why shouldn't they have as much right to travel as anyone else?"

Officer Haley also is concerned about the young hitchhikers.

She says, "Many of these kids come over the hill from the San Jose area. Often they tell their parents that they are just going to a movie or to a friend's house."

"If they look young, we stop them and check their identification. Many don't have any. We try to call their parents and the parents come and pick the kids up. About 85 per cent of the parents are unaware that their kids are hitchhiking. We pick up just as many girls as boys, and now the ages are getting younger. Two years ago most of the hitchhikers were 17 to 19. Now we get a lot of 10 to 13-year-olds."

"We suspect that there are a lot more molestations than are reported. It is a little hard to report a molestation, especially if you were hitchhiking when you weren't supposed to."

Lt. Reed stated, "We know of two cases of rape this year in the county."

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Chief Raymond MacIntyre of the UCSC campus police reported, "We have had several cases reported of people trying to pick up and bother female students. Several months ago, one girl was raped while attempting to hitchhike to campus."

Several girls were interview-

ed by The eSntinel, but none reported ever having any problems while hitchhiking.

Miss Santoriello said, "When I'm hitchhiking, I'm not about to get in the car with any stranger I don't think will get me where I'm going. Mostly hip people give me rides, but I've

also gotten rides from nice old ladies. Hitching is a learning experience."

Virginia Volante, a student, said, "It is kind of frightening, but it's nice to meet someone you were afraid of and find out they are nice people. It

reaffirms your faith in humanity. I live in Southern California and I wouldn't think of hitchhiking down there. Up here, people have a more open attitude towards hitchhikers."

She agreed that long-haired students were most likely to give her a ride.

Whether the county supplies the thumb or the youngsters have to use their own, hitchhikers are here to stay.

"Hitchhiking is a major form of transportation for kids in this county," says Scott Smith.

He hopes that the supervisors Tuesday won't turn thumbs down on the upraised thumb.



Opinion is widely divided on hitchhiking as a means of travel in Santa Cruz County. One thing is sure: More and more young people — some

of them not yet in their teens — are using their thumbs to get from one place to another. The county youth commis-

sion has asked the supervisors to make the practice "more respectable" by establishing specific hitchhike pickup stations.

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