

New Transportation Vision Needed in Ventura County

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Pulse asks: "What should local officials be doing today, to best prepare the county for its future travel needs?" This is indeed a timely question. And the answer is not as simple as some might think. One's initial reaction might be to look to all the old ways of "improving" our mobility—widen the existing roads and pave more new roads because of the ever increasing population of people (and cars). I submit to you that if that is all we do, then we will be doing a great disservice to future generations.

Where there is no vision a people perish. So said Ralph Waldo Emerson. Ventura County would be wise to take Emerson's simple statement to heart. Traditional planning to widen and expand roadways, regardless of quality of life issues, is not comprehensive or creative enough to deal with our future travel needs.

What we need is to create and implement a long term vision that combines road improvements with significant transit improvements and provides an opportunity for future light rail or a monorail system. We need to implement this combined vision in such a way that regular people, like you and me—who rarely take mass transit now for any of our daily travel trips—will be happy to do so for *some* trips because of how convenient and pleasant the experience is for us. It is not necessary for us to change *all* of our behavior—only some of it. If a lot of people change just a little bit of their own travel behavior, the cumulative effect will be enormous in facing the travel challenges ahead of us.

"Mass transit convenient and pleasant?" I know that most people now think that nothing could be further from the truth. Well, it is not an oxymoron for mass transit to be both convenient and pleasant. Let me give you a personal example that happened to me by accident—using some existing public transit services.

On March 13, I had to go to Sacramento to personally deliver a grant application so that it would reach its proper state office on deadline. Someone drove me to Burbank Airport to catch my plane. When asked how I would get home at the end of the day after delivering the grant, I said: "Don't worry. I'll figure something out."

Later that day, I arrived back at Burbank Airport around rush hour. Suddenly, as the plane landed, I realized that I could most likely catch the Metrolink train back home to Moorpark. Excited to see if this could work for me, I took the FREE shuttle to the airport's Metrolink station (a half mile away). Within a few minutes, the Ventura County Metrolink line pulled up to the platform and I was on my way back to Moorpark (for less than \$6). Talk about

convenient and comfortable! In 46 minutes I was at the Moorpark train station, after a totally relaxing and pleasant ride home. I could not have driven home that fast in my car—if I had brought my car.

As a member of Ventura County's Citizens Transportation Advisory Committee (CTAC), I thought to myself: Why isn't this service being touted more—as a way for business travelers to get out of their cars altogether—on the days when they may be taking single day-trips to Northern California from Burbank Airport?

Unfortunately, there are far too few opportunities for everyday people to have convenient and pleasant mass transit experiences like this to substitute for some of their automobile trips. And there are far too many missed opportunities in the county, or with CALTRANS, both of whose management and staff are plotting mass roadway improvements without also trying to balance more mass transit improvements into the equation to improve our future travel. The familiar saying: "If you build it, they will come" is applicable to freeways and roads. Experience shows they are growth inducing projects that fill with cars as fast as you can build them. However, "Build it and they will come" also applies to convenient and pleasant mass transit.

Yet we continue to divert monies that are supposed to be used for mass transit improvements to pay for massive road improvements instead. And then we wonder why the roads become even more congested.

Ventura County is now getting ready to do a partial general plan update, instead of a more prudent full general plan update. A full update would examine the cumulative and growth inducing impacts of proposed road "improvements" in conjunction with all other elements of the county general plan to the year 2020. Now, after the overwhelming passage of the SOAR measures and Measure A, our outdated county general plan should be completely overhauled to be sensitive to the voter mandate. During this process, we should be conducting a county-wide transportation vision exercise, in public, that would put a premium on identifying and funding ways to create a better transit infrastructure to complement our road infrastructure and look toward future options of monorail along the 101 median or light rail— instead of relying almost solely on expanded road improvements to supposedly solve all our future travel problems. We cannot pave enough roads to solve all transportation problems without destroying much of what our people have voted to protect (agriculture and open space).

On top of all that, the baby boom generation is graying. Currently 13% of the population are seniors. By 2030, 20% of the population will be seniors and by 2050, 25% will be seniors (Planning and Conservation League, January 2000). Senior citizens, in order to stay more mobile, must have better public transportation than currently exists. To not plan for this now is a big mistake.

We cannot wait until 2010 or 2020 to notice how difficult it is for people, especially seniors, to get around on what will be more overcrowded roadways by then. We need proactive planning now to create a travel-friendly county that depends less on individual auto trips. This can happen if we have visionary leadership who does something

creative to balance transit and road improvements so that transit becomes more convenient and pleasant for more people than ever before.

If we create more convenient and pleasant transit opportunities, then more of us will choose to use them more frequently. If we don't do that, then we will be faced with massive automobile traffic jams on more and wider roads and will suffer a serious loss of our quality of life. The choice is ours and I hope we are up for the challenge!

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