



Cars shouldn't drive traffic plans

Staff Report

Article Launched: 09/15/2008 12:09:25 AM PDT

ALLAN NICHOL

I WAS RECENTLY named by the Sausalito City Council to be a part of a Bicycle and Pedestrian Task Force to update the city's bicycle master plan.

Sausalito perhaps has one of the larger contingents of bicyclists in the country who travel across the Golden Gate Bridge, and then down constrained Alexander Avenue and pour into the downtown and points beyond.

Last year, one evening at the Buckeye restaurant, I ran into a fire captain who said, "Practically every day we are up on Alexander to assist a bicyclist who had an unfortunate experience with a car."

Wow. I knew it was dangerous, but didn't realize it was that bad.

My middle daughter, who biked frequently on Alexander, told me there were some very tricky spots because of roadside vegetation and constrained lanes or no lanes.

Being an advocate for "Class 1" bicycle paths, or separated bicycle/pedestrian pathways, and hearing all this; I came to the task force meetings with a concern that we need to do something about these conditions.

Not only are there serious concerns around safety, but we must find an alternative to the automobile.

The streetcars that Michael Rex and I are advocating for Marin are an important step, but providing a comprehensive Class 1 bicycle system is also a priority.

New York Times columnist Tom Friedman stated that he was in Copenhagen at the 6 o'clock rush hour and that 50 percent of the traffic was bicycles.

What was even more surprising to him was that it

Advertisement

was raining. People were in rain jackets and pants. Copenhagen has dedicated bicycle lanes everywhere and they are used.

In America, with more and more people looking for solutions to high fuel costs there is a beginning shift to pedal power and as Jan Hoffman in a Times article entitled "Moving Targets" stated "Bikers and drivers fight over their patch of asphalt."

Indeed, when I heard Mike Anderson, a consultant with Alta Planning state that from police incident reports, it was not the inexperienced and helmet-less tourists coming down Alexander, it was the experienced racing-colors bicyclists who were getting

hurt.

At the first meeting of the bike task force, I could see in the initial draft report the Sausalito portions of Alexander Avenue didn't even make its "Major Recommendations."

I squawked.

After much discussion, this route did make the top category, yet there is no money for studies, much less construction.

This is a shame, as bicycling is one of the most satisfying and healthful ways to get around.

This summer, at a recent Transportation Authority of Marin board meeting, Sausalito City Councilman Paul Albritton asked why was it that TAM was planning to spend millions studying accommodations for the outdated automobile over the next 20 years, and Sausalito had to put in \$5,000 for a preliminary study for a demonstration electric streetcar line.

Interesting question.

We all know we need to change many of our development and transportation patterns. It is time for a new future where we realize a new found sense of community and engagement.

There are billions of dollars slated for outmoded fossil fueled transportation. Let's channel that money to safe, sustainable, and fun ways to travel.

Marin can lead the way.

Allan Nichol is a Sausalito resident.

To the Editor,

As one of the propagators of bringing back electric street cars in Marin. I awoke this morning and read in the IJ what we had expected, the strong headline: "Too few Riders for Trolley". Also, I thought how ironic, as right below, an article is describing additional hardships coming for seniors. In an automobile dominated world, seniors have a devil of a time getting around Marin.

After getting Sausalito, Mill Valley, San Anselmo, and Fairfax's unanimous city council support for streetcars, a small fund was initiated to study a Sausalito-Mill Valley route. HDR, a large national transportation firm, was hired. The conclusions were all negative: too long a route, no ridership, no money, never done before. HDR came up with all the wrong answers because our policy makers did not ask them the right questions.

The right questions are: First, how do we reduce greenhouse gas emissions in Marin? With 62% of the GHGs coming from the tail pipe, change in transportation is fundamental. Second, how do we re-socialize our society? The car has isolated us in our landuse and in our traveling. Third, how do we revitalize the economics of our downtowns and provide lower cost housing? And lastly, what new funding sources will become available in the Obama administration, and in California due to passage of SB375 and AB32 both aimed to reduce GHGs by 80%.

Also it didn't help to have a disbelieving TAM Executive Director managing the study. In conversation with the Director of the Portland streetcar system his comment was, "Oh, yes, the bus people fight these kinds of trolley systems." With 60 trolley systems in the US in start up mode, most were resisted by bus transit systems, even though with the creation of new trolley lines, bus systems increased ridership. And the other source of resistance we have experienced are transportation planners. When I suggested to the head of a San Francisco transportation firm that trolleys could get 20% of the trips in Marin. She was polite and then laughed behind my back. Of course, we must understand the very difficult struggle Amy van Doran, Marin Transit director. She and her giant staff of two provide bus trips in Marin on a shoestring budget and dreading each penny rise in diesel prices. The transit system we have is a charity effort dedicated to providing limited service for the least possible money. Everyday must be like trying to put Humpty Dumpy back together again.

We have two systems of transportation in Marin. One has 200,000 cars that each cost around \$10,000 a year to support with maintenance, gas, payments, etc and has an annual cost of 2 billion dollars. And that doesn't count highway and road construction/maintenance. The second is the transit system, and is for people who don't have cars. It has 50% Hispanic ridership, and over 70% of riders make less than \$27,000. We have two unequal systems. And people are aware of the environment concerns around the use of the automobile, but do you think they are getting on a bus? Not a chance. A fashionable electric trolley, now that's another thing. And if we did get 20% ridership, and that's for starters; in one year savings on the automobile, that is enough to pay for the entire streetcar system in Marin. Of course, they are different pots of money,

but if we start making the auto pay for its true cost to the environment, and social and landuse disconnect, we could help create funding strategies that would work in Marin.

It is hearting when we speak to the man or woman on the street and when we ask them what they think of a trolley system in Marin, almost universally, the response is, “What a good idea.” The people get it. We can do this in Marin.

Allan Nichol, Architect
61B Sunshine Ave
Sausalito, CA 94965
415 331 1459
architect@villagematters.org

To the Editor:

Business as usual

During the past week I have attended two workshops that are examining the future of transportation in Marin. On Saturday it was TAM, Transportation Authority of Marin, and where Supervisor Steve Kinsey set the tone of the workshop with concern over Global Warming and stated that with half of Marin's greenhouse gases coming from cars, trucks and buses; how our society needs to modify the way we get around. Then Bonnie Nelson of Nelson Nygaard Consulting Services showed a slide presentation of trends in Marin: our day-trips are increasingly local and 40% of those trips are 2 miles or less, 63% of jobs in Marin are Marin residents, and that we are aging, by 2020, 35% of Marin's population will be over 65. These appeals and trends set the stage for a real transit network, something we don't currently have. Since I come from a position that we must find a meaningful alternative to the automobile I had great expectations for the workshop.

Also, during the past week it was reported that climate change had fooled the scientists' models. The complex computer modeling that had the summer polar ice sheet set to disappear in 2050, certainly a cause for concern, was actually wrong. The melting is dramatically accelerating; hence a blue ocean will be at the North Pole in 10 to 13 years! Where is Santa Claus to go? And the IPCC, Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, stated that growth in greenhouse gas emissions from 1970 to 2004 has been 70%, and that we don't lack the technologies or the know how or the right policies to arrest this catastrophe in the making, but what we do lack is the political will. Indeed, Climate Change is coming on so rapidly that it isn't just about doing the right thing for the planet, but what we are really talking about here is our very survival.

Unfortunately TAM's Saturday workshop didn't measure up to Steve Kinsey's call for change, nor did it reflect the changing demographics that were presented. Many of us came with new solutions and looked forward to a chance to present these ideas. There was no public input permitted. Instead it was a complicated Project Prioritization Worksheet exercise called "*Visionating*" that wished to tweak road projects and gave only lip service to bicycle and pedestrian connections and our currently dysfunctional bus system. This Workshop wasn't about the future; it was about trying to shore up our current system. It was business as usual.

On May first, Mill Valley had it traffic consultant group, headed up by David Early, to present future visions for Miller Ave. Again, no public input was permitted and we were just to rubber stamp new left turn lanes, brightly painted pedestrian walkways, and a roundabout at TAM High School that doesn't work. It was business as usual.

If we had been permitted to present our ideas, this is what we would have said: The answer to Marin's transportation dilemmas is in understanding the way we got around Marin in the first third of the 20th Century. We did it with electric trains and trolleys. It was a completely integrated system with ferries to the City and trains to Northbay communities, not to mention everywhere else in the US. Taking this old idea and tying it to new technologies and methodologies, we propose using trains, ferries, and regional buses for travel through and outside of Marin, street cars rolling on tracks running along major transit corridors that reach 70% of urban Marin. You press a button on your cell phone and your location lights up on a GPS controlled map mounted on a jitney's dashboard. There will be jitneys circulating like bees throughout neighborhoods picking up people and dropping them off at the nearest streetcar stop. The jitneys will be free, funded through revenue generated by doubling parking fees for those who insist on driving. Everyone will have a reader card, like the fast passes on the Bay's bridges, that will debit your prepaid account for all forms of transit where fares are collected, avoiding the need and time delays associated with handling money. People like streetcars, because they run quietly and smoothly, plus they can be fun. How about a streetcar with a portion of the roof that rolls back on a nice day.

For the past couple of decades scientists have shown a temperature graph that displays how the Warming can be arrested by diminishing our fossil fuel use. The 'Business as usual' line is the one with the most extreme heating. Our communities are not well served by these transportation planners who can't look beyond the "Industry Standard" for traffic and parking, who lack vision for real change, and who control the dialogue.

Allan Nichol Architect
61B Sunshine Ave
Sausalito, CA
415 331 1459

To the Editor

Chicken Little was right...the sky is falling- actually it's disappearing. NASA reports the upper atmosphere or Thermosphere is undergoing dramatic collapse in its density. This doesn't sound good; collapse is never a good word. I know as much about it as you do, but looked into it. The scientific articles on Google say this is by far the largest layer of the Earth's atmosphere, and its temperature is an astounding 1000 degrees centigrade and every 11 years the sun has a solar minimum which reduces this layer of the atmosphere. CO2 also contributes to its reduction. After many 11 year cycles in an ever-slowing decline of density, all at once the loss has become abrupt. The sun and CO2 only can account for 40% of this increased loss...there is 60% unaccounted for and no one knows why. The Blogs state this reduction of the Thermosphere could permit more meteor impacts on the earth's surface. Wow! Better get a steel hat.

Seems to me the atmosphere is a fundamental piece for life on earth, and with fossil fuels and other industrial emissions, we know we are destabilizing the oceans, observing a vortex of extinction of our plants and animals, and heating up the atmosphere, now we may be losing it also.

Who is responsible for this? Why it is you and me. When we get in our cars we are a part of the problem that creates 60% of our greenhouse gases here in Marin.

We need to change the way we move around. Get on a bike. Buy electric and use solar to charge. And bring back the electric streetcars that ran around Marin 80 years ago. We can continue to have a good quality of life we just need to get a different transportation system. Eighty years ago we in the Northbay had an amazing system of trains, trolleys and ferries that provided well for our transportation needs. Folks could travel by train and ferry to San Francisco from most towns in Marin, and get there faster than we do today by car. The US took out its trains and trolleys in the 1930s and 40s, and because of that, America is like a banana republic when it comes to transportation. Many countries in the world are far ahead of us, but the welcome trend is for streetcars being installed in our towns and cities once again. Currently 60 new streetcar systems are in the process of being funded and built in the United States.

Marin Trolleys is a citizen activist organization in support of electric streetcars to once again be on our streets. Bringing change to our society is difficult, particularly when so much private and public money is dedicated to the automobile. But change we must and we will have a much easier time of it than many regions, as our towns were linked by rail in the past. And we have developed in a way that 70% of urban Marin will have good access to a trolley. Most of us never leave Marin when we move around, and that is what Marin Trolleys is for. It is a system just for Marin. And, yes it's expensive, but a pittance compared to supporting the automobile. We have 241,000 cars in Marin for 270,000 people. That equates to two and half billion dollars we pay here for the car every year. And that doesn't include the vast sums that Caltrans or local governments spend on highways and roads. The city councils of Mill Valley, Sausalito, San Anselmo and Fairfax believe we can change and unanimously endorsed the trolley. Jerry Brown says Marin leads the way for California. Join us and make history. To learn more, visit our website at www.MarinTrolleys.org

Allan Nichol, Architect