



M A R I N C O U N T Y
SUPERVISOR
KATE SEARS

MARIN'S TRAFFIC PROBLEM: IS IT HOUSING?

Traffic is on everyone's radar. If you find traffic congestion more prevalent during your commute, errands and weekends, you might conclude that our problem is population growth. You'd be mistaken...

While Marin grew significantly from 1950 to 1970, the growth rate has been modest since then. Between 2000 and 2010, the growth rate plunged to 2.1%, the slowest growth in fifty years. Going forward, Marin's population growth is expected to level off at just 0.3% per year (202 persons). The traffic problems we now experience are not the result of a growing population.

Cars, Cars, Cars

In Marin, we don't have a population problem; we have a car problem. In the 60's, we had only one-third as many cars as people living in Marin. Even with the population "boom" of the 70's, Marin still had only half as many cars as people. By 2010, we had nearly an equal number of cars in our garages as people living here. And that includes all the non-drivers: children and older adults!

Our local transportation infrastructure cannot support four times as many vehicles as it was designed and built for. No wonder we are gnashing our teeth, looking for a way out of this mess.

Problem 1: Inadequate Local Circulation

We will never be able to build enough roads to make driving convenient again during commute hours. Because one-third of our trips are 3 miles or less, we don't have to depend on driving for all our trips. Bicycling and

walking are viable (and healthy!) replacements. We need to create safe and convenient alternatives for some of our trips: better bike paths, sidewalks and local transit options. To improve our quality of life, we need to develop these “car-free” choices for getting around our neighborhoods.

Problem 2: Too Much In-Commuting

We all notice the southbound morning back-up on 101 exiting at Tiburon Boulevard/E. Blithedale to get to the Strawberry/Tiburon peninsula and Mill Valley. And we’ve all gotten stuck in the northbound afternoon and evening commute traffic on 101 heading to the Richmond Bridge. Motorists trying to avoid that traffic cut through to Tiburon on Belvedere Drive, getting off 101 at Seminary Drive.

The majority of Marin’s workforce, nearly 60 percent, now lives outside Marin County. To get to work each day, Marin’s workers drive farther on average than any other workforce in the Bay Area.

Marin has the highest percentage of in-commuting of any county in the Bay Area. Nearly all of Marin’s in-commuters drive to work rather than take transit or bike, and more than 73% of commuters drive alone.

We can reduce the impacts of in-commuting by developing better transit connections to other counties and better carpool and vanpool options. Building workforce housing would enable people working in Marin to live closer to their jobs.

What Can We Each Do?

Can we get all these cars off the road? Given our suburban geography, that's not realistic. But we can reduce the number of car trips. We are the traffic!

Each of us, taking a small step to reduce our car trips, can make a difference. Cut one car trip from your usual routine. Find one opportunity to carpool. Check out the bus schedule – you might find it is convenient for one of your

trips. Take a bike riding skills class. Press schools to restore or enhance school bus service. Take your visitors on the Muir Woods Shuttle. Ride the ferry when you can.

Let me know your ideas about how to reduce driving and I will share them in my next community newsletter.



All public meetings and events sponsored or conducted by the County of Marin are held in accessible sites. Requests for accommodations may be made by calling (415) 473-4381 (Voice), (415) 473-3232 (TTY) or by e-mail at (disabilityaccess@marincounty.org) at least five business days in advance of the event. Copies of documents are available in alternative formats, upon request.

###