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City hopes to encourage commuters to break out their bikes

by Promise Yee

07.15.10 - 05:34 pm

ENCINITAS — A panel of transportation and planning experts shared ways cars, bikes and pedestrians can share the road at the alternative transportation lecture held at the Encinitas Library on July 12. The meeting is the fifth in a series of six lectures planned to give residents in-depth background information on key areas of the city's 20-year general plan, which is now under revision.

Presenters on the panel encouraged the audience to dream big about what future roadway needs might be.

Recent statistics show 74 percent of people in San Diego County drive solo to work, 11 percent carpool, 3.5 percent use public transportation, and less than 5 percent bike or walk to work.

Increasing the percent of people who bike, walk and use public transportation benefits the environment by decreasing the use of oil and amount of car emissions. "There's a lot of room for the U.S. to improve," said Nilmini Silva-Send, senior policy analyst for Energy Policy Initiatives Center at University of San Diego School of Law.

State Bill 375 demands California cities reduce greenhouse gas by 5 to 10 percent by 2020.

In addition to helping reduce the amount of vehicle pollution, walking and biking also help people keep fit. In a comparison study of similar populations in the San Diego communities of Normal Heights and Claremont, walking 138 minutes a week versus 65 minutes a week cut incidents of being overweight by 25 percent. Building bicycle- and pedestrian-friendly roads increases the likelihood people will get out of their cars and walk and bike. "Bicycles are good for communities," said Kathy Keehan, executive director of San Diego County Bike Coalition.

Community building and neighborhood safety increase with more people on foot and bike. "If you have a lot of bicycles you're doing something right," Keehan said.

Features of bike- and pedestrian-friendly roadway include smooth pavement, clearly marked bike lanes and crosswalks and bike racks at the end of the destination.

The key to safety for walkers and bikers is to slow the speed of vehicles with roundabouts, curb extensions and narrower roads.

Presently there are no standard national methods to determine where bike lanes and sidewalks are most needed, but workable methods are being developed.

Encinitas has planned a streetscape design for Coast Highway 101 that includes sidewalks and bike lanes. How to incorporate bike and foot traffic on roadways in

other parts of the city will be considered during later meetings in the two-year process of developing the city's general plan.

The final lecture on public health will be held Aug. 2.

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