

Killer Traffic: How are we going to survive?

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Everyday millions of people lose hours of their life reading bumper stickers and trying to guess the meaning of lie from the vanity plate of the car in front of them. As tax payers, people deserve the right to focus their energies in directions better suited to solving problems of their family or the world, not just on “Am I going to make it home before I have to pee?” or “Do I have enough gas to make it home?”

Every year, millions of new drivers get their license freeing them from the home. This increases the daily driver’s commute time and reduces the amount of time a mother and father spend molding their children’s future. According to a study by Elisa Barbour in 2006 which results were given at a luncheon by The Public Policy Institute of California (PPIC) and The California Institute for Federal Policy Research, “... enough Californians have such long commutes that the state’s average time increased by 10 percent, to 27 minutes, over the past decade and a half. Moreover, the proportion of workers who commute 45 minutes or longer increased, and California’s average commute time is 10 percent higher than the nation’s average.” These results are statewide which doesn’t express the severity we currently face in Southern California.

Steps need to be taken now to convince drivers to change their habits and look into alternative forms of transit and fuel-efficient vehicles, which will help alleviate the stress we face daily. In order to facilitate these possibilities, steps must be instituted now to reduce daily commute times and increase the state’s flexibility to adjust for maintenance and upgrades as traffic patterns change. As populations continue to grow, less land will be available to continue accommodating the increasing traffic congestion. Such land as the California Aqueduct system can be utilized to relieve congestion during California’s dry seasons.

The California Aqueduct system remains empty during the months from June to November. During these months an express corridor with minimal on/off ramps could be created to allow longer commute drivers to make the drive easier, without the added delay from on/off ramps or other distractions which slow traffic. A single lane of traffic in each direction with a shoulder for emergency vehicles and breakdowns could reduce freeway traffic. To prevent stranded vehicles from danger of rushing water at the end and the beginning of the rainy seasons, a barricade device can be installed at the on/off ramps and the roadway patrolled by state vehicles or helicopters prior to closure for the expected flooding.

Another use would be to install a train system like a monorail on a raised platform down the center of the aqueduct for year round traffic for long distance commuters. This could be beneficial if the departure times are between 15 and 20 minutes from each station, which would give the long distance commuter options and the flexibility to leave and arrive according to their schedule not the schedule of the transit line.

A monorail system could also be installed down the center of major freeways. This could also benefit the freeways by offering a high-speed alternative for commuters along with persuading drivers off of the freeways to more energy efficient modes of transportation. Carpool lanes had an advantage over 10 years ago by allowing vehicles of two or more persons a short cut to waiting in traffic by an exclusive route. Nowadays carpool lanes are as slow as the rest of the traffic. By opening these lanes to normal traffic and installing a mass transit system on a raised platform in the center of the freeways will give more room to the average commuter and the feeling of exclusivity to people who are trying to make a difference. This in turn will convince others to try by the stories of satisfaction passengers share. These monorail systems could be the new “Starbucks” with other perks like Internet, food, and other creature comforts to

convince people that the alternative is better and possibly an alternative workspace to conduct meetings and accomplish other daily tasks.

Another policy would need to be instituted adjusting the current age necessary to obtain a driver's license for high school students from 16 to 18 years would also be beneficial, like Social Security raising the age for full-retirement from 65 to 67. According to the Social Security Agency, this policy change was instituted in 1983; to begin with people born in 1938 or later, gradually increasing the age until it reaches 67 for people born after 1959. "When Social Security was enacted in 1935, the retirement age was set at 65. At that time a man aged 65 was expected to live another dozen years till age 77, and a woman till age 79. But today, a 65-year-old man can be expected to live another 16 years into his early 80s, and a woman to make it another 19, to age 84." This anticipation of the government to stretch Social Security dollars reflects the current need to limit the amount of new drivers. With current life expectancies, drivers are on the road for many more years and with current commuting times are spending more time on the road.

Additional benefits can be created such as tax breaks to help motivate drivers to make a change in their daily habits. By verifying their yearly mileage, they could receive tax deductions for lower fuel consumption or other benefits. This minor gathering of information added to an already in place smog check would not tax additional resources, preventing an increase in implementation costs. Adjustments for family size and commute distances can be included. Other benefits of increasing mass transit systems over single commuter needs would also reduce reliance on fossil fuels needed to produce gasoline. The additional energy supply to facilitate these changes can be derived from solar, wind, and other alternative fuel sources.

These alternatives may be costly to implement in the beginning, but the costs for future reconstructions of current transportation methods would offset the initial investment. If the innovators of our current society couldn't be expected to be prepared for the booming population created problems we currently face, how can we not be more proactive in our attempts to prevent future ones?

References

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