



Ventura County Star

Forum discusses transportation:

Dilemmas, solutions are offered

By Sue Davis
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Getting around is getting harder, and the burden falls hardest on those who can least afford it, speakers said Saturday at a forum on transportation in Ventura County.

"Transportation is a social justice issue," said state Assemblyman Pedro Nava, D-Santa Barbara. "It's about helping everyone to be prosperous and successful."

Several hundred people went to the Ventura County Transportation Action Forum to hear about transportation challenges in the county and to offer suggestions on changes they would like to see.

The event at Ventura College included sessions on bike issues, bus ridership and rail travel, and it featured elected representatives and members of government agencies.

The half-day meeting was put on by the Alliance for a Sustainable and Equitable Regional Transportation, a coalition of local groups with an interest in transportation. They include Central Coast Alliance United for a Sustainable Economy, or CAUSE, and Ventura County Climate Care Options Organized Locally, or VCCool.

Those attending included government officials, businesspeople and ordinary citizens.

"Transportation resonates with every single person," said M. Carmen Ramírez, community planning director for CAUSE. "You just know that improving transportation will improve the quality of life in our community."

Matt Breiner of Newbury Park said he went to the meeting because he had seen how transportation affects all aspects of life.

"There is a relationship between land use planning, zoning, social justice and the environment," said Breiner. "If we don't find ways to engage the public in this, we

will continue to have a dysfunctional environment, to continue to waste money and be inefficient."

Ventura City Manager Rick Cole said changes are needed.

"In the past 60 years, we have built cities around cars," said Cole. "People who walk, people who bike and people who use public transportation have a separate and unequal place in society, and that has to change."

Declining tax revenue, crumbling infrastructure and increasing demand have combined to burden the transportation system, said Darren Kettle, executive director of the Ventura County Transportation Commission.

Kettle said that because of declining sales tax revenue and the state's ongoing financial crisis, the \$40 million that Ventura County usually gets in transportation funds will probably shrink to \$30 million or less this year.

He also said that because Ventura County voters have rejected every transportation measure put before them, the county loses out on the possibility of getting federal matching grants.

The meeting ended with those attending identifying issues of concern, including broad ideas like making the roads safer for cyclists and having longer hours and more frequent bus service, and some other, very specific problems, such as the absence of bus service to the Ventura Adult and Continuing Education center.

"I think the main thing to come out of this meeting is that there is real community support around creating alternative transportation that meets human and social needs, instead of the needs of cars," said Cameron Yee, a researcher for CAUSE.