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Cycling report shows pilot program's success

By Chris Rooney
Twin Cities Times

While many Marin County residents already believed that cycling to work was an obvious benefit to the environment, a recent report from the U.S. Department of Transportation officially took a favorable stance toward biking and walking to the workplace. Marin is one of several communities involved in a pilot program researching the benefits of cycling and walking instead of commuting in cars.

Last week, the U.S. Department of Transportation confirmed the findings of an interim report to Congress on the "Non-Motorized Transportation Pilot Program." The report stated that there are climate benefits from programs that support bicycle and pedestrian travel. The study focused on eastern Marin, the area included in the research.

When asked about the report's findings, Marin County spokesman Craig Tackabery said, "I think Supervisor Kinsey described that well: 'This program, and its legacy, will change the face of transportation in communities across the country. Its contribution, and that of walking and bicycling, to the nation's fight against global warming will be notable.' "

Tackabery said the plan for a joint report by the included Marin communities was agreed upon in December of 2005, leading to the start of the report planning and development.

The nonmotorized trips covered in the report are also viewed as pivotal components of the nation's surface transportation system. The federal report reveals that, for eastern Marin, bicycling and walking trips are 13.6 percent of total trips, where commonly cited data place this figure near 9.5 percent nationally.

The report states that nearly 21,000 tons of greenhouse gas emissions are saved annually in the eastern Marin region.

"Of critical importance is the fact that these levels of non-motorized transportation reduce total vehicle-miles traveled (VMT) in eastern Marin by an estimated 48.3 million miles over the course of a year, or over 131,000 miles each day," the report states. "Based on the annual VMT reductions reported, a saving of more than \$8.3 million in fuel costs alone, and a reduction of 20,932 metric tons of CO2 emissions can be projected. Such a VMT reduction is an essential ingredient, along with improved automobiles and fuels, in meeting the nation's goals of fighting global warming and achieving greater energy independence."

The interim report is one element of the federal Non-Motorized Transportation Pilot Program. Still in its initial stages, the program is providing Marin County and three other pilot communities \$25 million over four years to implement a comprehensive set of projects and programs to encourage biking and walking.

In addition to reduced greenhouse gas emission, anticipated benefits include congestion relief, low-cost travel alternatives and improved public health. In releasing the report, U.S. Secretary of Transportation Mary Peters wrote, "Bicycling and walking ... are environmentally friendly solutions to meeting growing mobility demands."

The report details the early stages of the program, which looks to assess the benefits of incorporating biking and walking programs, as well as educating the public about them and encouraging them to participate.

A copy of this interim report can be found at fhwa.dot.gov/environment/bikeped/ntpp/index.htm. A final report on the program will be published in 2011. In the meantime, progress can be monitored and additional information on the local program can be obtained on Marin's program, walkbikemarin.org.

Tackabery wrote in an e-mail to Marinscope that the findings will be used to evaluate the program and to provide a "good source for other transportation and health initiatives."

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