

Reduce Greenhouse Gases, and Achieve Other Benefits, by Alternatives to Cars

Under the Global Warming Solutions Act of 2006, California is to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions to 1990 levels by 2020. This is a noble goal. The 93-page draft “scoping plan” about ways to help lower the state’s greenhouse gas emissions contains many good ideas but misses others.

Tellingly, Page 2 – the first page after the pretty cover - and at least four other pages of the report are marked “This Page Intentionally Blank,” an inexplicable waste of paper (and the water to produce it, and the energy, and the associated greenhouse gases) in a document ostensibly about “greening” California. Unfortunately, there are some inexplicable blanks in the analysis as well, with even more serious consequences.

The draft plan identifies the main greenhouse gas culprit. Like President Bush and Osama bin Laden, however, the scoping plan pays lip service to arresting that culprit, but rather than doing so instead vents on easier targets and asks for as little sacrifice and change by the population as possible.

The main culprit: transportation (read: cars). The draft plan acknowledges that transportation is the single largest contributor in the state, accounting for 38 percent of greenhouse gas emissions. But the plan does not address the reduction of car traffic except incidentally, such as a factor in planning new community developments. Instead, the plan pins all hope on lighter-carbon fuel and more fuel-efficient vehicles. All to be hoped for and worked toward, but population growth alone is likely to outstrip many such efficiency gains in vehicles. Further, increased car traffic has a variety of other negative impacts, including: increased road construction and maintenance costs; time wasted in traffic; traffic fatalities and injuries (one of many sad facts: Auto accidents are the No. 1 cause of death for U.S. children ages 3-14); the tens of thousands of dollars many consumers must spend on fuel and maintenance and repair and insurance rather than

food, housing, medicine, college and investments. Some of these, of course, have greenhouse gas issues themselves (e.g., road construction).

The draft plan avoids the words “public transportation” all together, and mentions bicycles only as an aside. These are two proven methods for reducing car traffic. Taking public transportation rather than driving greatly reduces per capita greenhouse gas emissions. Bicycles involve zero greenhouse gas emissions (at least once they have been built and delivered to the store).

The scoping plan’s failure to feature these as means of reducing greenhouse gases is inexplicable other than to say: business as usual, cars uber alles. “Trust in the same market forces that got us into this mess to get us out. Consumers need do nothing but wait for the market to provide the solution. The answer lies in: shopping! Until then, and after then, keep driving.”

The plan should, instead, set real goals for investment in public transportation. The plan should also endorse policies like those embodied in the Congressional resolution (Resolution 305, see below) sponsored by Rep. Earl Blumenauer, D-Ore., which calls for increased and improved bicycling programs at the local, state and national levels. “If you build it, they will come.” If we build roads, there will be more cars. If we build bike trails and bike routes on traffic streets, there will be more bicycle riders. Ask people in Davis, or Santa Monica, or Berkeley, or Sausalito, or anyplace else it has happened. In San Francisco, for example, the number of bicyclists using a street increases as much as 300 percent when a bike lane is striped. In Portland, Ore., bike ridership is up 400 percent after such improvements. In Minneapolis, after investment in nonmotorized infrastructure, almost 20 percent of all trips are now walking or by bike. Imagine if that were true in Los Angeles.

Blumenauer’s resolution (which has passed the House and is awaiting Senate approval) recognizes that many car trips are only a mile or two – distances most

everybody could cover in a bicycle, with multiple benefits. Not the least of which is reduction in greenhouse gases.

The scoping plan could and should call for funding and incentives to create more bicycle trails and routes; to allow and facilitate bicycles aboard rail and bus systems; to provide safe bike parking at destinations; to put a bike or bike/ pedestrian lane on all portions of all major bridges in the state.

The scoping plan also goes after other big players in the greenhouse gas arena, and in fairness, it should. No one sector - - industry, buildings, agriculture, water, etc. - - should either escape or bear the brunt of new regulation. But failure to address transportation issues by reducing car use, in favor of wishful thinking that technology will solve everything (Just wait for the new generation light bulb! Just wait for the new generation car engine!) disservices the goal of the scoping plan and California legislation.

The draft scoping plan is a worthwhile start down a necessary path. But it – and we – cannot simply ignore known, effective answers to the single largest greenhouse gas problem in the state and hope to achieve the goal of greening California.

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This article represents the views of the author and not necessarily those of his employer or any of its clients.

Below: the text of the Congressional resolution encouraging bicycling

Recognizing the importance of bicycling in transportation and recreation. (Referred to Senate Committee after being Received from House)

HCON 305 RFS

110th CONGRESS
2d Session
H. CON. RES. 305
IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

June 2, 2008

Received and referred to the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation

CONCURRENT RESOLUTION

Recognizing the importance of bicycling in transportation and recreation.

Whereas a national transportation system conducive to bicycling produces enriched health, reduced traffic congestion and air pollution, economic vitality, and an overall improved quality of living is valuable for the Nation;

Whereas by dramatically increasing levels of bicycling in United States cities tangible and intangible

benefits to the quality of life for cities and towns across the country will be realized;

Whereas we now live in a Nation with 300 million people, and that number is expected to grow to 365 million by 2030 and to 420 million by 2050 with the vast majority of that growth occurring in urban areas with limited ability to accommodate increased motor vehicle travel;

Whereas since 1980, the number of miles Americans drive has grown 3 times faster than the United States population, and almost twice as fast as vehicle registrations;

Whereas one-third of the current population does not drive due to age, disability, ineligibility, economic circumstances, or personal choice;

Whereas the United States is challenged by an obesity epidemic, 65 percent of United States adults are either overweight or obese, and 13 percent of children and adolescents are overweight, due in large part to a lack of regular activity;

Whereas the Center for Disease Control estimates that if all physically inactive Americans became active, we would save \$77 billion in annual medical costs;

Whereas over 753 of our Nation's Mayors have signed onto the climate protection agreement of the United States Conference of Mayors urging the Federal Government to enact policies and programs to meet or exceed a greenhouse gas emission reduction target of a 7 percent reduction from 1990 levels by 2012;

Whereas the transportation sector contributes one-third of the greenhouse gas emissions in the United States and passenger automobiles and light trucks alone contribute 21 percent;

Whereas bicycle commuters annually save on average \$1,825 in auto-related costs, reduce their carbon emissions by 128 pounds, conserve 145 gallons of gasoline, and avoid 50 hours of gridlock traffic;

Whereas the greatest potential for increased bicycle usage is in our major urban areas where 40 percent of trips are 2 miles or less and 28 percent are less than one mile;

Whereas in 1969 approximately 50 percent of children in the United States got to school by walking or bicycling, but in 2001 only 15 percent of students were walking or bicycling to school;

Whereas as much as 20 to 30 percent of morning traffic is often generated by parents driving their children to schools, and in the United States, motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death for children ages 3 to 14;

Whereas many public agencies in cities are using bicycles to deliver critical municipal services, for example, more than 80 percent of police departments serving populations of 50,000 to 249,999 and 96 percent of those serving more than 250,000 residents now have routine patrols by bicycle;

Whereas surveys show that a majority of people want to ride and walk more but are dissuaded by concern over traffic danger and other barriers, and case studies have shown that when those barriers to bicycling are removed, people start riding;

Whereas investment used for improvements for bicyclists and promoting bicycle use resulted in the quadrupling of bicycle use in Portland, Oregon, since 1994 and a recent report to Congress on the nonmotorized transportation pilot program reveals that 19.6 percent of trips in Minneapolis, Minnesota, are made by biking and walking, reflecting the benefit of initial investments in nonmotorized infrastructure;

Whereas the American bicyclist generates enormous economic returns, in 2006, the national bicycling economy contributed \$133 billion to the United States economy, supported nearly 1.1 million jobs across the United States, generated \$17.7 billion in annual Federal and State tax revenue, produced

\$53.1 billion annually in retail sales and services, and provided sustainable growth in rural communities;

Whereas a national network of interconnected urban and rural bikeways can provide valuable community benefits, including low or no-cost recreation and alternative transportation options for people of all ages and abilities;

Whereas mountain biking is an environmentally friendly, healthy nonmotorized outdoor recreation activity that encourages young people to experience our natural world, and engenders community support for preservation of open space;

Whereas each year major charity bike rides in communities across the country raise in excess of \$100 million for critical medical research to find cures for life-threatening diseases;

Whereas 57 million adults in the United States bicycle each year, and bicycling and walking currently account for nearly 10 percent of trips and 13 percent of traffic fatalities, yet less than 2 percent of Federal transportation safety funding is currently spent to make bicycling and walking safer; and

Whereas communities across the United States are seeking ways to reduce traffic congestion, improve air quality, increase the safety of their neighborhoods, and decrease petroleum dependence, bicycles offer a simple, healthy, energy-saving alternative to driving: Now, therefore, be it

Resolved by the House of Representatives (the Senate concurring),
That the Congress--

- (1) recognizes that increased and safe bicycle use for transportation and recreation is in the national interest;
- (2) supports policies that--
 - (A) establish national target levels for increased bicycle use, reduce the number of motor vehicle miles traveled (VMT), improve bicycle safety to be achieved within a specific timeframe, and collect data needed to monitor progress;
 - (B) increase intermodal travel between public transportation and bicycles;
 - (C) provide incentives for State and local governments to adopt and implement complete street policies designed to accommodate all users, including motorists, pedestrians, bicyclists, transit riders, and people of all ages and abilities;
 - (D) encourage bicycle use in communities where significant segments of the population do not drive and where short trips are most common;

- (E) expand funding for core Federal transportation programs that support non-motorized infrastructure, education, and encouragement programs by--
 - (i) safeguarding existing funding sources for nonmotorized transportation from inequitable treatment in the Federal transportation funds rescission process;
 - (ii) supporting funding for core Federal transportation programs that support nonmotorized travel, including transportation enhancements, safe routes to school, and recreational trails; and
 - (iii) ensuring that highway safety improvement program funds are spent in proportion to the percentage of bicyclist and pedestrian fatalities in each State;
 - (F) facilitate the development of a coordinated system of United States bicycle routes across the country that cross state borders and connect metropolitan regions;
 - (G) create bicycle-friendly Federal land protection legislation, such as national recreation areas, to encourage regulations and management practices for mountain biking as an environmentally friendly nonmotorized use of natural surface trails;
 - (H) provide flexibility in Federal transportation law that would speed up the delivery of nonmotorized infrastructure without sacrificing necessary environmental protections;
 - (I) provide Federal tax or funding incentives to--
 - (i) States that adopt motor vehicle laws that protect the rights of bicyclists to share the road;
 - (ii) businesses that expand bicycle-friendly programs for their employees;
 - (iii) the health care industry to develop more member discount programs, that target increased physical activity such as bicycling and walking; and
 - (iv) provide bicycle commuters the transportation fringe benefits currently provided to people who commute by car or mass transit; and
 - (J) build upon the 'Green the Capitol Initiative' as a model, create and provide an environmentally sustainable and healthy working environment for employees that includes the promotion of bicycling as a transportation alternative;
- (3) encourages the Department of Transportation to provide leadership and coordination by reestablishing the Federal bicycle task force to include representatives from all relevant Federal agencies.

Passed the House of Representatives May 21, 2008.

Attest:

LORRAINE C. MILLER,

Clerk.

By Robert F. Reeves,

Deputy Clerk.