

To: Keith Caldwell, Chair,  
Corridor Steering Committee, SR29 Gateway Corridor Plan

From: Genji Schmeder, member,  
Citizens Advisory Committee, SR29 Gateway Corridor Plan

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Subject: Comment for Agenda Item 4, Draft Corridor Vision Plan

The Draft Corridor Vision Plan misses our main chance to permanently improve transportation in south Napa County. We have an overused mode of travel, private automobile, which gets most of the attention, and an underused one, the bus, which is treated as one of several afterthoughts, so-called alternatives. In terms of economics, the overused mode long ago passed into the range of decreasing marginal returns, where each additional driver makes the experience of every driver more expensive (measured in time) and makes improvements more difficult and expensive (measured in money). In contrast, the underused bus system is still in the range of increasing marginal returns, where each additional rider has little effect on the others while making the whole system more cost-effective, and where a large increase in ridership can be absorbed by improvements that are inexpensive and flexible compared to road improvements.

Better signalization and other tweaks may squeeze out more capacity and higher average speed for cars on highway 29, but only capital improvements for road widening and intersection rebuilding will have a large effect. And the projected increase in car traffic will gradually use up the new capacity, so we will revisit the same problem in a decade or so at a higher level of difficulty and expense.

In contrast, bus system capacity can be increased during commute hours without need for major capital improvements. Any large increase in ridership would probably develop gradually, allowing time to plan for additional buses and staff and for selective shorter headways. More bus riders on highway 29 will create more demand for transfer buses all along the route. But that's a positive side effect since it means less local car traffic around Napa Valley.

Since buses and cars use the same roadway on highway 29, congestion caused mainly by private cars degrades the bus as an alternative. But this common dependence also means that any large shift to bus riding relieves congestion for everyone.

We cannot expect overnight to change the culture of individually driving to work, but we have in the SR 29 study an opportunity to lead public opinion and future practice. Our bus system is considered a last-resort mode, for people unable to afford a car or unable to drive. We need to promote the bus as a convenient and inexpensive option for people who prefer to relax for most of their journey to and from work. Another reason to recruit riders from a broader economic range is to create a more effective political constituency supporting and advising on high quality bus service.

Focusing on improving the commuter driving experience on SR 29 will narrow our study to the most expensive, least permanent remedies. Greatly increased bus ridership should be our preferred solution to the SR 29 problem.