

More commuters driving alone, census finds

By GENARO C. ARMAS, Associated Press, *August 21, 2002*

WASHINGTON (AP) - It's a commuter's Catch-22: Sit in traffic jams in the comfort of your car by yourself, or find another way into work that would get you out of traffic but may take just as long, like carpooling or mass transit.

Despite increased congestion and longer trips, more people still decided to go it alone - 2000 census figures show about 76 percent of workers 16 and older drove solo to their jobs, up from 64 percent two decades earlier and 73 percent in 1990.

Government encouragement to take public transportation, fluctuating gas prices and warnings about the harmful effect of car exhaust on the environment did not dissuade more commuters from driving alone.

"I'd rather sit in my car alone in air conditioning in traffic than wait for a train on a hot platform," Stacy Brown said before pulling away from a gas station where she fueled up for her morning commute. Brown said traffic has grown worse in the four years since she started driving the 25 miles from Frederick, Md., to Rockville, Md., just north of Washington.

For many drivers, longer commutes alone in the car is the price paid for larger and more affordable homes in the suburbs. And it's the result of congested highways choked by urban sprawl that has turned many suburbs and even rural areas into burgeoning business hubs.

Plus, America's love affair with the car means solo drivers will always constitute a large portion of commuters, said Michael Marsden, an Eastern Kentucky University professor who teaches a course on the automobile's role in society.

"People want to drive their own cars, decide when they want to go, where they want to go," he said. "In some ways, the only time people are in charge are when they are in their cars, not at home or at work. It's a very psychologically satisfying thing."

The Census Bureau asked people their "usual" mode of transportation to work. So, for example, someone who drives to a train stop would have to choose one or the other as the primary way to work.

Carpooling was the second-most-popular way to work at 12 percent, down from 20 percent in 1980 and 13 percent in 1990.

Public transportation was used by 5 percent, about the same as in 1990, while those who walk to work fell from 4 percent to 3 percent. People who work from home went up slightly to 3.3 percent from 3 percent.

Solo driving rates rose in every state in 2000 except Washington and Oregon, which saw small increases in public transit and work-from-home options.

Nationally, the average one-way commute rose to 25 minutes, about three minutes longer than 1990.

Alan Pisarski, a former deputy director of planning for the Department of Transportation who researches commuting trends, said the rise in homeownership correlates with the longer drives to work.

"There's a trade off with the mortgage and commuting time," he said.

Small metropolitan areas in the Midwest and South had the highest rates of solo drivers, led by the 87 percent of Ohio residents who commute in the Huntington, W.Va.-Ashland, Ky. metro area. For metro areas that encompass more than one state, the Census Bureau calculated rates for drivers in each state.

Pisarski said limited public transit options in those areas force more people to drive alone.

Washington, D.C., had the lowest rate of solo drivers, at 38 percent, followed by New York City at 44 percent. Both cities have a high percentage of workers using mass transit.

In expanding metro areas like Denver, growing suburbs mean the need for massive highway construction projects to accommodate the rise in solo drivers.

Denver native Scott Yates said construction on Interstate 25 - the major north-south corridor into Denver - is sorely needed. He grew so frustrated with traffic he started an Internet-based business giving subscribers e-mail updates of traffic.

"It was horrible before, it's now horrible squared because of the construction," said Yates, who works out of his home. "But at least people know five years from now it won't be gridlock all the time."

Modesto Bee, Community Briefs, August 19, 2002:

Air district calls on kids

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District is calling on young artists to submit drawings to illustrate the district's 2003 calendar.

The contest is open to all elementary school students in the San Joaquin Valley. The theme is "Spare the Air," and artwork can depict any air-friendly activity, message or concept.

Drawings can be in crayon, markers or watercolors and must be submitted on 8 1/2-by-11 unlined white paper. The page should be oriented sideways. The child's name, phone number, address, school and age should be printed on the back. The entry deadline is Sept. 30.

Mail entries to: Valley Air District, 1990 E. Gettysburg Ave., Fresno 93726. Avoid stapling or folding entries.

For more information, go online to <http://www.valleyair.org> or call (559) 230-5800.

Coaches respond to heat

By Paul Stanford, Madera Tribune, August 16, 2002

In light of the recent concern of for the potential hazards inherent in the air quality, coaches at Madera High School have responded with some changes to alleviate any danger to the athletes.

The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District said that the air quality early in the week was in the "red" zone. This occurs when the low-level ozone index rises about 150.

Combined with temperatures that have been consistently over 100 degrees, this ozone breakdown can be potentially harmful to everyone, including athletes.

As a result, Madera coaches have taken precautions to minimize any possible harm to the athletes.

"We immediately geared down the intensity of our practices," said head coach Mike Anderson. "We eliminated the conditioning aspect of our practices and worked mainly on basic mechanics of our offense and defense."

This should come as good news to parents' whose children are participating in these afternoon workouts.

The San Joaquin Air Pollution Control District issued warnings earlier in the week and indicated that in the early morning, the ozone level is roughly a 6 on the index, but in the afternoon can rise to 180-200. After dusk, the levels come down dramatically into the 80-90 range.

"Until the air quality returns to acceptable levels, we will continually monitor our players and make sure they are extremely well hydrated, said Anderson. "Even wearing pads was discontinued when it was necessary."

It appears as though there will be a coastal breeze moving through the Valley in the new few days. This should lower the temperatures and clear the air of these potentially harmful particulates in the air.

Letter to the Editor, Visalia Times-Delta, August 21, 2002

Hilarides dairy: Support project

I do not know where Mr. Bettencourt got his figures from ["Your Views," July 29].

I know for a fact that it was calculated to be several millions of dollars to have hauled the waste dirt away, probably to Kettleman waste, and to haul in new, clean dirt at taxpayers expense, causing the city of Lindsay to go bankrupt and lay off a lot of public employees, also I would imagine Tulare County employees.

Not creating new jobs? Mr. Bettencourt is wrong. Rob Hilarides' employee list will probably more than double. It will also give me and my 36 employees work for about two years of construction and about 150 subcontractors.

The dairies that he is on are old and run down. Modern dairies do not have the problems the old ones do.

Mr. Bettencourt and his neighbors are just making up a bunch of excuses not to have the dairy. Their issues were there long before the dairy was ever going to be built. Their issues are with the old Exeter dump, the Lindsay Olive brine ponds and the Lindsay treatment plant, not the Hilarides dairy. If I had as many problems as they have had over the years, I wouldn't subject my family to that, I'd move.

Dairies do not decline property values. Anyone knows property values go up when a dairy moves next to it. Maybe your properties went down when all the other issues came into play, not the dairy.

I have been brought up and worked around dairies most of my life. I have no problem from the dairies. I build them.

Maybe the folks who do not like farming and dairying need to move out of the Valley that puts food on the table from night to night. The cities are growing into farming and dairy areas, not the other way around. So deal with it or move. Maybe the big city smog and traffic would be better for you and the people who do not like farming and dairying.

Support this project. It's good for our economy, saved taxpayers millions by cleaning up the brine ponds and will create jobs.

TODD JONES

Visalia