

Ellen Pirie

Responses to People Power Questionnaire

The Highway

1. Do you support plans to widen Highway One between Santa Cruz and Watsonville? What effect do you think widening the Highway would have on the social and physical geography of the county?

I support the widening of Highway 1 between Santa Cruz and the San Andreas exit by adding a High Occupancy Vehicle lane in each direction. The current situation of idling cars stuck in gridlocked traffic is unacceptable from an environmental, public transportation and human perspective. The status quo dooms us to a future without viable bus service in the mid and south county areas. It makes individual efforts to carpool or use public transportation frustrating and pointless.

This is also an issue of economic justice. Many low income workers commute from south county (where they can find affordable housing) to jobs in Santa Cruz at a very high personal cost, in both money and time. An HOV lane on Highway 1 would make public transportation or carpooling an attractive and viable option for both South County commuters and for the entire community.

2. If you don't think widening the Highway is a good idea, what are some of your strategies for stopping it, given that it is currently the Regional Transportation Commission's top priority?

Not Applicable.

3. How would you answer those who believe that widening the highway would solve problems with congestion?

I do not believe that the Highway 1 HOV project will solve all traffic congestion problems and I do not think that most other supporters of the widening project believe that either. What we do believe is this: Adding HOV lanes will improve the situation by taking some of the cars off the road by encouraging carpooling and use of the bus, thereby giving people real transportation options.

4. What do you think about the current plan to build auxiliary lanes on the Highway from Morrissey to Soquel? If you disagree with the plan, how can we stop it?

I support the plan to build a half mile auxiliary lane in each direction on Highway 1 between Morrissey and Soquel Avenue. It is an essential part of the effort now under construction to make that portion of Highway 1 flow safely. Without the Morrissey to Soquel Avenue auxiliary lanes, the highway will go from four lanes to two lanes in less than 1/4 mile. I am concerned that there will be many accidents, injuries and perhaps deaths if

the project is not completed quickly.

The Rail Line

1. Do you support buying the Union Pacific Rail Corridor from Davenport to Watsonville? Why or why not?

Yes, I support the purchase of the Union Pacific Rail Corridor.

I have been a member of the Regional Transportation Commission (RTC) while we have negotiated with Union Pacific and done the environmental and financial analysis that is necessary. It is important that we understand the costs and responsibilities that owning the right of way will entail and are very careful with the public's money. As the last major thruway through the County, we need to assure that it remains a viable alternative county-wide transportation corridor and that we have a financial plan and the expertise to properly manage it. I am particularly excited at the possibility of a 31 mile bicycle and pedestrian path running the length of the county.

2. Do you support a trail along the rail corridor from Davenport to Watsonville. If so, what is your plan for its completion? How long will it take?

Yes, I support a trail along the corridor.

How long it will take to build a trail along the rail right of way will depend on whether there continue to be trains using the right-of-way and whether passenger rail options become viable. With active train service using the right-of-way, the construction of the trail is more complicated and more expensive. I have walked the rail line from Watsonville to north of Santa Cruz and I have seen the many bridges, trestles and overpasses that make simultaneous use of the rail line challenging. My expectation is that we will build the trail in segments, beginning with the areas where there will be little or no conflict with train use.

3. Should we run a passenger train along the corridor? If so, tell us what the service might be like in 10 years. What would you do to get it on track?

The studies that I have seen to date indicate that passenger train on the UP rail line would be prohibitively expensive. There are others who believe that with advances in rail technology, it will become viable. I am open to information that shows that and am eager to learn more. I am willing to fund research into the possibility of intra-county rail service. Any plan would need to link with the Pajaro Station to provide access to a network of rail service.

Bicycling and Walking

1. What will you do to make bicycling and walking more pleasant, safer, and more socially accepted in Santa Cruz County? How about walking?

I will continue to seek and approve projects that facilitate bicycling and walking. One of my highest priorities is to enable children to walk and ride bikes to schools. We have made improvements at and around Amesti School, Aptos High School, Mar Vista School and Valencia School. However, more needs to be done as it is still not safe enough for many parents to feel comfortable allowing their children to walk or bike to school. The planned streetscape improvements in Seacliff will make pedestrians and bicyclists feel safer and more welcome.

2. What are some of the most important infrastructure projects needed to reach the above goals? What are some smaller ones that you feel could really make an improvement?

It is very important the we repair our roads and maintain them in good shape. That will benefit everybody – drivers, walkers and bicyclists. In addition, I am hoping to add a sidewalk along Trout Gulch Road and sidewalks and bike lanes on Calabasas Road.

3. How do you get around? What form(s) of transportation do you use on a regular basis? How will you get to work if elected?

Currently, I travel predominantly by car to and from work, carpooling as often as possible with my husband from South County to the City of Santa Cruz and the County Government building. I bought a Honda Civic Hybrid last year to reduce my gas use. I make monthly trips to San Francisco for meetings and I use the Highway 17 bus and Caltrain. I love to take long walks but don't have the chance more than once or twice a week.

If I am re-elected, I will continue to drive alone and carpool, since public transportation is not currently an option where I live.

Buses and Bureaucracy

1. What is your opinion regarding the Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission (the RTC) – its function, and/or its compilation? If you would prefer a different structure, how would you change it?

I think that the RTC is representative of the County as a whole, which is good. With representatives from each of the four cities and all of the supervisorial districts, the Commission hears from all viewpoints and responds accordingly, which is why Highway 1 is its top priority.

2. What about the Metro Board? Is it well constructed? Does it function well? Does it need to be reformed? If so, how?

I have never served on the Metro Board and I don't have an opinion about its structure or its functioning.

3. If elected, how will you work to support mass transit in Santa Cruz County?

I will continue to do what I have done during my first two terms: Advocate strongly for financial support at a local, state and federal level for mass transit in Santa Cruz County and thoughtfully consider creative ideas that make the system accessible, sustainable and responsive to commuter needs.

Two for the Road

1. What strategies would you advocate for reducing the need for, and the use of, the private single-occupant automobile as the dominant means of travel in Santa Cruz County?

The most important thing we could do is make mass transit a viable option for the 200,000 county residents who don't live in the city of Santa Cruz. The best way to do that is to have reasonably priced express buses running between south and north county on a frequent basis. People will use a transportation option that works for them; they won't use one that doesn't work and that is the problem with our bus system. Right now we are giving commuters no option other than the single occupant automobile.

2. Do you agree with the idea that peaking oil supply will cause a dramatic increase in oil/gas prices over the next several decades? If so, what would you do as Supervisor to prepare Santa Cruz County for these changes?

I agree that the high price of gas and oil is probably here to stay and that we need to help our county residents get where they need to go in this "new world." Transportation options should be available throughout the County at a reasonable cost. The County does a lot to encourage van-pooling, ride-sharing and transit use. The County provides subsidized vans, flex hours and telecommuting for employees.

The County needs to increase its use of alternative fuel vehicles for its own fleet.