

John Leopold
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?

After years of discussion and heated arguments we have not accomplished our shared goals of alleviating congestion. Without a completed environmental impact report it is not possible for me to fully understand the impacts of the widening on our natural and social environment. In some of the presentations about the widening effort, I have heard Highway One described by RTC staff as the “Main Street” for Santa Cruz County. I noted that plans included the destruction of valuable community assets along this “Main Street” including valuable commercial properties and public amenities, which would be unacceptable to me. Given the size of this project, the lack of information about its real benefits, its damage to our environment, and the financial indebtedness, I do not support widening Highway One.

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?

I think that there are shared strategies that would address congestion on the highway and I would seek to work with the RTC on those projects. These could include metering ramps with possible bypass lanes for buses, emergency vehicles and carpoolers. We need to use greater imagination about how to move people around rather than simply widening the highway, which has not proven useful where it has been tried. We need to do an Origin Destination Study and have good data to know where the traffic is coming and going and develop strategies according to those needs.

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

I think we need to break out of the narrow thinking that widening the highway is the only way to deal with congestion. The past battles have proved that we need a new perspective that incorporates many different modes of transportation. We need to address congestion through the full funding of our public transportation system, the purchase of the rail line, the addition of “Bus Rapid Transit” lanes on Soquel, and other means of sustainable alternative transportation. These could be coupled with affordable changes to the highway (such as metering) that would begin to address the issues of congestion. Even if we were to move forward with widening, the project would take years and we need to address other alternatives now. Let’s put forward a positive proposition of what we can do instead of fighting over what we may never be able to do.

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 am unclear whether auxiliary lanes would provide any congestion relief or whether they are an attempt to further a plan for widening. The EIR may address this issue. Over the last ten years we have put a tremendous amount of money into the highway project. My read of the results of the

TFTF poll and my conversations with scores of mid-county residents is that we need a balanced approach to transportation funding. The community is clearly looking for some viable alternatives. We need to know what will be the impacts of these auxiliary lanes and what would be the benefits and the costs of such a plan. We should seriously consider greenhouse gas audits for the entire lifecycle of new transportation projects so we are fully contemplating the effects of our choices on our community health.

The Rail Line

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

I absolutely support the purchase of the Union Pacific Rail Corridor. As the last major thruway through the county, we need to assure that it remains a viable alternative county-wide transportation corridor.

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?

I support a rail trail on the rail corridor. This has proven to be effective in many other communities and led to increased property values. With the proximity of the rail corridor to local schools, recreation facilities and commercial areas, the rail trail would provide an excellent opportunity for adults and children to choose a transportation route off the main streets. . A key part of the planning for the use of the rail trail will be to determine what width the trail portion will be. We must make sure that it is a safe and viable route for both pedestrians and bicycles. We must purchase the rail corridor and assess all strategies for completing a rail trail. This is an area that with some focus from the RTC and local jurisdictions, we could move affirmatively forward with.

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?

A passenger train appears to be a possibility on the corridor. There was a passenger rail line through Live Oak at the beginning of the last century, which was a critical part of the transportation system. Any plan would need to link with the Pajaro Station to provide access to a network of rail service. I would seek to identify methods to subsidize this service and encourage research to assess whether we can support a 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?

To make bicycling and walking a more pleasant, safer and usable mode of transportation in our community we must move forward on projects that facilitate the separation of pedestrians and bicycles from the motoring public. I support the planning and process that is being used to develop a more pedestrian and bicycle-friendly path along East Cliff Drive. This plan incorporates both a walking path and a bike path. As a parent who would like to bike with my daughters, paths such as these would be incredibly beneficial. Likewise the work that is to be done on 30th Avenue helps make an important pathway safe for pedestrians and bicyclists. We need to prioritize projects that help create continuous routes that link different neighborhoods

with major bicycle arteries if we want to encourage and promote bicycling and walking. We also need to create safe routes for kids to go to school and insure that we have safe routes that cross Highway One in order to make the entire community navigable for bicyclists and walkers. Lastly if there are opportunities to create “bike boulevards” we should look closely at those ideas.

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?

Projects within the redevelopment area should prioritize routes that encourage bicycling and accessible sidewalks or pathways. The RDA might be able to leverage state and federal money to support this goal. We should look at particular intersections that may be unsafe and look for traffic calming devices that would make these intersections safer. We should work to build a comprehensive plan within the RDA for capital improvements that look towards a long-term goal of having a connected network of sidewalks and paths that facilitate alternative modes of transportation. Overall there should be a balanced approach that allows our community to have access to safe routes for walker and bicyclists.

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, driving a carpool nearly every morning for my daughter and her friends on the way to school. I am a recreational bike rider. If I am elected my goal would be to bike to the county building as often as possible.

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 don't have a specific concern about the make up of the RTC, but I do think that it needs to broaden its perspective on transportation to include achievable and successful transportation alternatives that may have been missed by its primary focus on widening Highway One.

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

The biggest challenge that the Metro Board has faced (outside of constant battle for funding) is the demise of good employee relations and the failure of that Board in the last negotiations to work forcefully to avert a strike. We must insure that the Board is ready to be fully engaged during contract negotiations so we can find labor peace and not jeopardize the entire community with the loss of our public transit system, even for a few days.

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

I will advocate 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 county needs a viable economic development strategy that allows people to work closer to their homes, thereby strengthening our communities and alleviating congestion on our roads. According to a recent report by the Live Oak Family Resource Center, over 30% of the residents in Live Oak travel over an hour to get to work each workday. We must develop job opportunities in the area that would reduce transportation time, make alternatives attractive and strengthen the tax base. We must be willing to consider alternatives such as rail to compliment our existing mass transit system and look to develop sound economic development and employment opportunities in the district.

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?

We will be facing a review and update of the County General plan in the coming years, we must address the push to have sprawling developments (regional and local) and look toward development strategies that enable and facilitate reduced vehicle miles driven. Transit oriented design, mixed-use development, improved economic development, improved public transportation and appropriate residential density increases can improve our situation. This planning needs to be supported by good data on transportation patterns and development goals within all the jurisdictions in the county.

The county can engage in a several activities that reduce oil consumption and promote the reduction of greenhouse gases. There should be incentives for homeowners and developers to make their new construction projects as “green” as possible, including the installation of solar panels, passive solar alignment and the installation of low-energy lights and appliances. Careful consideration should be made in the next general plan update to zoning that promotes slow and smart growth.

The county should serve as a model and move towards replacement of its fleet with more fuel-efficient, alternative fuel or hybrid vehicles and become and encourage other large employers to do the same. The county should promote carpooling among its employees and allow for telecommuting in appropriate job areas. Future consideration of new facilities should consider accessibility to public transportation.