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## On the Road Again

City's efforts pave way for cyclists and pedestrians

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Bicycle advocate Brenda Miller of PEDal rides along the Pacific Coast Bicycle Route on Monday, June 25.  
Photo by Stacie N. Galang

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# On the Road Again

City's efforts pave way for cyclists and pedestrians

By Stacie N. Galang  
San Clemente Times

The bicycle has long served as a simple means for transportation, but the city is eyeing it as a tool to kickstart economic opportunities, improve the environment and keep residents healthier and happier.

This month, San Clemente applied for a \$176,000 bicycle-based grant from the Orange County Transportation Authority that would be matched by \$26,000 from the city. If received, the grant would allow the city to increase signs along the Pacific Coast Bicycle Route, add more bike parking and develop a scan-code program for cyclists that would give them information about the city on their smart phones.

It's just the latest effort by city officials to make San Clemente more bicycle friendly. In January, the City Council made San Clemente the first community in Orange County to integrate a Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan into its General Plan, the document that acts as a roadmap for the city's decisions in years to come.

Mayor Jim Evert said planning for bicycles and pedestrians would be a key piece to the city's future. He was among a group of city officials who toured bicycle friendly Long Beach to get a sense of the possibilities for San Clemente.

Evert said making way for more bikes could help businesses by drawing locals and visitors out to shop and eat.

"I think if you have better transportation, a lot of local people will make the daily bike ride and end up in downtown where some may not currently venture because of parking," he said.

But the mayor noted that not all of the ways Long Beach has incorporated bicycles would work for San Clemente. Long Beach, for example, has many one-way streets that lend themselves to bicycle traffic, but that's not the case in San Clemente.

"You've got to remember, we're working with infrastructure that already exists, and we have to work with what exists within that infrastructure," he said.

Councilwoman Lori Donchak, who served for years on the city's Traffic Taskforce, hailed the decision for the city to better integrate other means of transportation aside from the car. A huge supporter of the a state and national program called Complete Streets, she said she hopes the city's efforts will make San Clemente more walkable and reduce traffic.

## As the Wheel Turns

San Clemente Transportation Engineering Manager Tom Frank said the city hired him in January, in part, because of his work to make streets more useable by more than just cars. The concept to consider the roads as more than just for use by car is often referred to as "multimodal," and Frank said he believes San Clemente is making good progress.

"Think of moving people by the most efficient way possible," said bicycle advocate Brenda Miller. "That's multimodal."

She agrees that the city is making great strides to better roadways for cyclists and walkers.

"I think the City Council understands what it can become," Miller said. "They were really visionary in that regard."

As an advocate who started the group PEDal, one of Miller's goals is to improve the roadways at every one of the city's 19 schools. She said 30 percent of all car traffic



Bicycle advocate Brenda Miller of PEDal stands near the Ole Hanson Beach Club with her passenger Foxy. Photo by Stacie N. Galang

is based on academic travel, that is, drop-offs and pick-ups from school. If San Clemente had safe ways for kids to get to and from school, fewer cars would be on the road.

Miller's 2010 study of bicycle and pedestrian traffic along the Pacific Coast Bicycle Route showed an average of 436 cyclists and walkers per hour for five hours in San Clemente. The numbers ranged from 50 per hour at Avenida Pico and Calle Deschecha to 270 per hour at the Trestles Trailhead at Cristianitos.

Miller looks to cities like San Francisco and Portland, Ore. as models for increased bicycle use.

"If you just look at the numbers and look at the data, if every child had a safe route, it makes a lot of sense," the avid cyclist said.

The added bonus would be that children and others who chose to walk and cycle would also get more daily exercise.

## Cycling Trends

Pete van Nuys, executive director of the Orange County Bicycle Coalition and a San Clemente resident, said historically the city has been a friend of the cyclist. In 1976 during the country's bicentennial, a pair of bicyclists created the Pacific Coast Bicycle Route from Canada to Mexico. San Clemente was a city along the way.

Nearly 40 years ago, city planners helped to develop a portion that took cyclists off main roads and through downtown San Clemente, van Nuys said.

"What it's meant is a reduction in the conflicts between motorists and bicyclists," he said.

Victor Becerra, director of UC Irvine's Community Outreach Partnership Center, said cities are increasingly looking at bicycle improvements as an economic tool and a means to keep its citizens healthier and the air cleaner.

"I think people, in general, are looking for opportunities to get out of their car," he said.

Becerra noted that certain factors are improving communities' ability to plan for bikes. For one, it's easier for cities to redesign streets to accommodate bicycles than it is to get more cars on the road. Also, the car culture is evolving as more people realize the expense of driving.

The director said cities looking to revitalize their downtowns and draw young professionals to live there must also create amenities they seek. Young people want to be more environmentally conscious and bikes are just one way for them to do so.

## The Road Ahead

Already, San Clemente is moving to design streets to accommodate more than the car. Though in the early planning stages, a 0.9-mile strip along El Camino Real — from North Beach to Dana Point — is being designed to include bicycle lanes on both sides of the road and a dedicated lane, known as a Class 1 bicycle lane, on the west side of the street.

If all goes as planned, Frank said the city would like to have the permits in place within a year and construction would start shortly thereafter.

When city leaders looked at the La Pata Extension, they also made sure the roadway that will eventually connect with San Juan Capistrano had bicycle lanes and a walkway for pedestrians.

Miller advocated strongly for the bicycle and pedestrian components on La Pata given that students may use it to get to San Juan Hills High School.

Another project that's still in the conceptual stage is the Pico Corridor Project, which would create a route along the Segunda Deschecha Channel. If it moves forward, a paved path from Talega to North Beach would be created. Residents could walk, push strollers and ride bicycles from one of the city's inland neighborhoods to the beach.

Long-term, van Nuys would like to see San Clemente develop a bicycle and walking route from the business parks off Avenida Pico to other neighborhoods. He envisions roadways created without the daunting slopes.

Becerra said cities like San Clemente are also trying to attract more tourists, especially in the summertime. Leveraging the environmental component can be way to draw in visitors, he said.

"I think the environmental movement has certainly done a lot to get people to rethink what cities should look like and how they can promote of health and well being both environmentally and on a personal level," he said. "They have created the pathways for cities to do something about making the place they're responsible for healthier."

Frank agreed about the quality of life.

"People will have an alternative method for transportation and get out of the car, ride a bike, exercise and enjoy the fresh air and the environment," the transportation manager said.

With fewer cars on the road, the air quality improves, too, he added. San Clemente should learn if it's grant application is approved next month, Frank said. **SC**