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Planning Commission
Community Development Department
3015 H Street
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Dear Planning Commission and Staff,

As the representative of an organization that advocates for sustainable transportation, I would like to provide comments on the Economic Development Element of the Humboldt County General Plan Update.

First, I want to make it clear that proponents of sustainable transportation also support robust economic development. Since our comments would likely be categorized as relevant to Alternative A, I think provisions of Alternative A should represent this world view. We do support “enhancement” of economy (in addition to maintaining it). We support clear, unambiguous environmental regulations which we believe can streamline permitting through their clarity, and we support internet redundancy and access. These principles are reflected in suggested changes at the end of this letter.

Second, I would like to lay out the argument for strengthening our economy through emphasis on sustainable transportation. Much of this argument is based on research conducted by Todd Littman of the Victoria Transportation Policy Institute in papers called “Automobile Dependency and Economic Development” and “Win-Win Transportation Solutions: Cooperation for Economic, Social and Environmental Benefits.” available at vtpi.org. I provide a synopsis of the VTPI studies with some facts and figures more directly relevant to Humboldt County. I believe this research illuminates the importance of adopting Land Use and Circulation Elements that foster sustainable transportation in order to strengthen our economy.

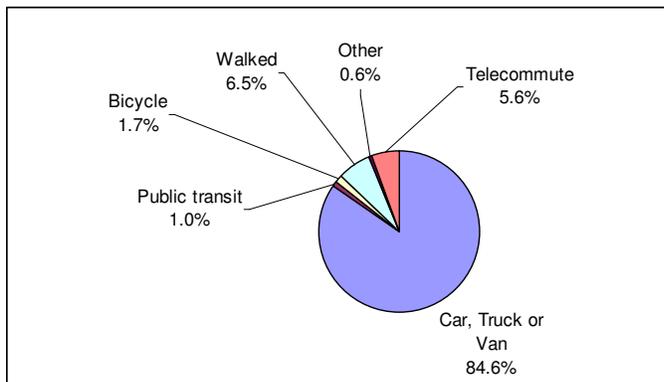


Figure 1 Use of commute modes by type in Humboldt County, based on 2000 U.S. Census data.¹

Automobile Dependency is defined as high levels of per capita automobile travel, automobile-oriented land use patterns and reduced transport alternatives. Humboldt County currently fits this description. About 85% of Humboldt County workers commute by private car and only 1% ride public transit (Figure 1). This transportation system provides convenience and mobility for motorists, but not for the 1/3 of the population that is too young or old to drive, and not those who cannot afford a car.

Cost to Car Owners

A big cost of automobile dependency is increased vehicle and fuel expenditures. Estimates of the cost of car ownership vary from \$3943 to \$7830 per year.² If we take the conservative cost estimate for the average 2 cars owned per household, and factor in 2.4 people per average household we find that Humboldt County spends \$423,435,305,³ owning and operating automobiles. This does not include the substantial external automotive costs such as enforcement costs, subsidized parking, road building and repair, loss of farm and forest lands, reduced diminished air quality, impaired health and increased asthma associated with automobile dependency. On average, a household is spending 17% of its income on cars.

Cost to the Economy

Because the many of the goods and services related to car ownership and operation are imported into our region (the cars themselves, fuel and insurance), 70% of that almost half a billion dollars leaves the county without being re-circulated.⁴ That means that solely due to automotive expenses, 13% of the vitality of our economy is immediately drained straight out without re-circulating.⁵

Besides direct costs for car ownership and operation, there are many general costs of automobile dependency, such as time wasted in traffic congestion, crash damages and environmental impacts. The per-mile costs for these along with road and parking construction costs increase as per capita auto use increases. The higher the per capita car use, the more deaths and the more transportation expenditures per passenger mile. As automobile dependent regions grow congested, virtually all travel time savings are eventually devoted to increased travel. Mobility is high, but access is low. Accompanying sprawling land use reduces the amount of land available for other productive uses and increases the costs of providing utilities, public services and stormwater management. As an area grows more automobile dependent, all these costs hinder economic development.

Table 1 Economic Data on Global Cities, 1990⁶

	Australian Cities	US Cities	Metro Toronto	European Cities	Wealthy Asian Cities	Developing Asian Cities
Per capita GRP	\$19,761	\$26,822	\$22,572	\$31,721	\$21,331	\$2,642
Per capita car use (kms)	6,536	10,870	5,019	4,519	1,487	1,611
Per capita road expenditures	\$264	\$142	\$150	\$135	\$88	\$39
Road expenditure per \$1,000 GRP	\$7.19	\$9.84	\$6.65	\$4.26	\$4.13	\$14.76
Transit operating cost recovery	40%	35%	61%	54%	119%	99%
Transport deaths per 100,000 pop.	12.0	14.6	6.5	8.8	6.6	13.7
Total car and transit operating expenditures as portion of GRP	13.2%	12.4%	7.4%	8.1%	4.8%	15.9%

(GRP = Gross Regional Product)

When one compares regions with different levels of automobile dependency, a pattern begins to emerge. Many countries experience their greatest economic growth when per capita automobile use is relatively low, and economic growth rates decline as households become wealthy enough to afford more consumer goods such as private cars. In wealthy Asian Cities, where automobile travel is deemphasized, transportation costs to the economy are less than half what they are in automobile dependent cities (Table 1).

Free Market Means Freedom of Choice

The reduced choices of travel mode available to the consumer in an automobile dependent region are part of systemic market distortions. Once a region becomes automobile dependent, there are few viable alternatives to owning and driving an automobile and little competition or incentive for innovation. Automobile use is under-priced because most costs are either fixed or external. Lower-density, automobile-dependent land use patterns are also under-priced because many public policies favor automobile use, including dedicated road funding, road designs that favor motor vehicle traffic over other road uses, and zoning laws that require builders to provide generous free parking.

Consumers can't choose independence from cars because the choice is not offered. Builders tend to build sprawl because it is what they are used to doing, whether this is the kind of housing that is in demand or not. If home buyers and renters are not offered less car-dependent options, they will not be able to buy them. Furthermore, if most of the built landscape is inaccessible without a car, property buyers must incur the fixed costs of an automobile if they want access to those areas, even if they don't need one for most of their activities.

Because the U.S. has few regions with low automobile dependence, many mistakenly assume that this land use and transportation pattern is inevitable, and the only way to provide adequate mobility to drive economic activity. There is evidence to refute this assumption. In recent years some cities, particularly those in Northern Europe, have made concerted efforts to reduce automobile dependency by increasing transport choices and reducing automobile subsidies such as free parking. The initial evidence is that these efforts can provide a variety of economic, social and environmental benefits. There is no evidence that such policies are economically harmful.⁷

Evidence closer to home indicates that money spent on transit generates more regional income and regional jobs than automobile expenditures, or even non-automotive consumer expenditures (Table 2). Transit is good for the economy.

Table 2 Regional Economic Impacts of \$1 Million Expenditure⁸

Expenditure Category	Regional Income	Regional Jobs
Automobile Expenditures	\$307,000	8.4
Non-automotive Consumer Expenditures	\$526,000	17.0
Transit Expenditures	\$1,200,000	62.2

This table shows economic impacts of consumer expenditures in Texas.

Humboldt County does have a choice. We can choose to move towards a balanced land use and transportation system that provides efficient access between housing, jobs, goods and services. If we choose to continue to sprawl, we will watch our economy dragged down by automotive expenditures and our local governments saddled by heavy road and infrastructure expenses.

Suggestions for changes in wording for the Economic Development Element follow. I hope this correspondence will encourage you to strongly emphasize sustainable, balanced transportation in the land use and circulation elements as well.

Sincerely,
Chris Rall
Green Wheels

C.C. Humboldt County Board of Supervisors

¹ Arcata Bicycle and Pedestrian Masterplan. 2004.

http://www.arcatacityhall.org/pedestrian_bike_plan/ped_bike_plan_cover.html

² American Automobile Association. Your Driving Costs 2007. Estimates \$7830 per year.

<http://www.aaaexchange.com/Assets/Files/20073261133460.YourDrivingCosts2007.pdf>

Bureau of Labor and Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, estimates \$7887 per year spent on the average two vehicles owned per household from

<http://www.bls.gov/ro7/cexwest.htm>

³ \$3943 per car-year * 2 cars per household (see above) * 128,330 people / 2.39 people per household (BLS 2006 estimate for Humboldt County) = \$423,435,305

⁴ Jon Miller, Henry Robison & Michael Lahr, *Estimating Important Transportation-Related Regional Economic Relationships in Bexar County, Texas*, VIA Transit (San Antonio; www.viainfo.net), 1999.

⁵ \$423,435,305 * 0.693 (Percentage leaving economy from Miller et al.) / (\$17,203 per capita money income * 128,330 people (BLS 2006 estimates for Humboldt County) = 13.3%

⁶ Jeff Kenworthy, Felix Laube, Peter Newman and Paul Barter, *Indicators of Transport Efficiency in 37 Global Cities*, Sustainable Transport Research Group, Murdoch University (Perth; <http://www.wistp.murdoch.edu.au>), for the World Bank (Washington DC), February 1997; Peter Newman and Jeff Kenworthy, *Sustainability and Cities; Overcoming Automobile Dependency*, Island Press (Covelo; www.islandpress.org), 1999.

⁷ Leo Lemmers, "How Amsterdam Plans to Reduce Car Traffic," *World Transport Policy and Practice*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 1995, pp. 25-28; John Pucher and Christian Lefevre. *The Urban Transport Crisis in Europe and North America*, MacMillan (London), 1997; Special Issue on Transportation Demand Management, *IATSS Research*, Vol. 22, No. 1, 1998.

⁸ Jon Miller, Henry Robison & Michael Lahr (see above)

Table 11-1. Plan Alternatives Comparison Chart

				<i>Table 11-1. Plan Alternatives Comparison Chart</i>			
<i>Plan Alternative</i>			<i>Goals</i>	<i>Staff Remarks</i>	<i>Vote: R, D, M</i>		
	B	C	ED-G1. Stable Economy. To enhance and maintain a diverse, stable, and growing local economy with an emphasis on base and emerging industries, innovation, entrepreneurship, and global competition.	See alternative wording below			
A			ED-G1. Stable Economy. <u>To enhance and maintain a diverse, stable, and growing local economy with an emphasis on base and emerging industries, innovation, entrepreneurship, and global competition.</u> To maintain a diverse, stable local economy with an emphasis on strengthening existing local industries.	Plan A alternative wording			
A	B	C	ED-G2. Broadband Internet. To establish a reliable broadband internet infrastructure that distributes a choice of economically accessible broadband services into our most rural communities, and is not vulnerable to disruption. Integrate broadband service capability into new buildings and developments. Provide broadband access in remote or rural communities.				
A	B		ED-G3. Quality of Life. To attract and retain young talent by developing vibrant town centers that incorporate a mix of employment, housing, and retail uses as well as access to child care, transportation, and cultural and natural amenities.				
A	B	C	ED-G4. Skilled and Ready Workforce. To foster a local workforce that is prepared to succeed in the industries growing in Humboldt County, which values early education, vocational training, and lifelong learning.				
	B	C	ED-G5. Streamlining. To implement permitting and licensing processes that are more responsive to the needs and timelines of the marketplace, particularly for microenterprises and home-based businesses.				
A			ED-G5. Streamlining. To implement permitting and licensing processes that are more responsive to the needs and timelines of the marketplace, particularly for microenterprises and home-based businesses, <u>by providing clear information on what is required, and minimizing the number of steps required where possible.</u>				

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	B	C	ED-G6. Transportation Networks. To have transportation facilities that allow freight mobility along the interstate highway system and provide connectivity between residential neighborhoods and employment centers.		
A			ED-G6. Transportation Networks. To have transportation facilities that allow freight mobility along the interstate highway system and provide connectivity <u>emphasize pedestrian, bicycle and mass transit access</u> between residential neighborhoods, <u>commercial districts</u> and employment centers <u>while still allowing for automobile access.</u>		
A	B	C	ED-G7. Public Water and Wastewater. To have and maintain adequate public water and wastewater facilities to accommodate workforce housing and provide opportunities for businesses to grow.		
A	B		ED-G.8 Natural Resource Assets. To protect productive agricultural, mineral resource, timber, and coastal dependent lands.		
A	B		ED-G9. Brownfields. To clean up and reuse brownfield sites.		
A	B		ED-G10. Cooperation and Collaboration. To build and maintain partnerships with cities, neighboring counties, and the private sector that build and enhance common assets and resolve common obstacles.		
A	B		ED-G11. Economic Development Assistance Programs. To administer and support financial and technical assistance programs that support workers, businesses, and service providers.		
A	B		ED- G12. Informed Public. To educate County residents of economic trends, emerging markets, innovations and opportunities for entrepreneurship that benefit the region’s economic prosperity.		
<i>Plan Alternative</i>			<i>Development Policies</i>	<i>Staff Remarks</i>	<i>Vote: R, D, M</i>
A	B		ED-P1. Prime Employment Land Protection. Identify and protect prime employment lands from conversion and encroachment of conflicting uses.		
	B	C	ED-P2. Airport Expansion. Support expansion of the airport to include service to major airport hubs and expanded flight schedules.		
A	B		ED-P3. Broadband Internet. Promote the provision of broadband infrastructure in all communities.		

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A	B		ED-P4. Workforce Housing. Promote the development of workforce housing and mixed-use housing around multi-modal transportation options.	
A	B		ED-P5. Child Care. Promote the provision of child care facilities within business, commercial and industrial centers and housing developments.	
A	B		ED-P6. Revitalization. Promote the revitalization of underutilized lands in communities in transition due to the decline of resource-based industries.	
A	B		ED-P7. Brownfields. Consider land use designations for brownfields to encourage cleanup and reuse.	
A	B		ED-P8. Commercial and Industrial Sites Database. Maintain a commercial and industrial sites database and continue to improve accessibility to online information on commercial and industrial property.	
A			ED-P9. Commercial Retail. Large format “big box” commercial uses shall not be located in the unincorporated area to avoid sprawl.	Plan A alternative wording
	B		ED-P9. Commercial Retail. Include standards for discretionary review of large format “big box” commercial uses to reduce their land use impact.	Plan B alternative wording
		C	ED-P9. Commercial Retail. Include standards for discretionary review of large format “big box” commercial uses.	Plan C alternative wording
	B		ED-P10. Industrial Parks. Where appropriate, promote development of well planned and designed industrial parks catering to existing local, as well as outside opportunities. Encourage master environmental assessments for industrial parks in order to streamline the subsequent development process.	From Framework Plan
<u>A</u>			ED-P10. Industrial Parks. Where appropriate, <u>P</u> romote development of well planned and designed industrial parks catering to existing local, as well as outside opportunities <u>that emphasize access to pedestrians, cyclists and transit riders by placing them close to workforce housing and existing mass transit routes.</u> Encourage master environmental assessments for industrial parks in order to streamline the subsequent development process.	<u>Plan A alternative wording</u> From Framework Plan

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<i>Plan Alternative</i>			<i>Investment Policies</i>	<i>Staff Remarks</i>	<i>Vote: R, D, M</i>
A	B		ED-P11. Financial Resources. Acquire and distribute financial resources for workforce training, economic research, infrastructure, and business development.		
A	B	C	ED-P12. Freight Mobility. Pursue financial and technical solutions to provide reliable interstate truck access on both U.S. 101 and State Highway 299.		
A	B	C	ED-P13. Broadband Internet. Support the development and management of a redundant fiber optic line that connects to the fiber backbone running along the U.S. 5 corridor. Support the expansion and delivery of broadband Internet in the rural or remote communities in the county through all appropriate technologies.	See alternative wording below	
A			ED-P13.5. Broadband Internet. Support the expansion and delivery of broadband Internet in the rural or remote communities in the county through all appropriate technologies.	Plan A alternative wording	
A	B		ED-P14. Workforce Housing. Encourage production of housing at a price commensurate with income levels, and a transportation system to provide efficient connectivity between housing and places of employment to maintain satisfactory commute travel times and distances.		
A			ED-P14. Workforce Housing. Encourage production of housing at a price commensurate with income levels, and a transportation system to provide <u>efficient multimodal</u> connectivity between housing and places of employment to maintain satisfactory commute travel times and <u>negate distance-the requirement of car ownership for access.</u>	Plan A alternative wording	
A	B		ED-P15. Public Infrastructure. Pursue and distribute funding and technical assistance to upgrade and enhance the water and wastewater facilities of communities.		
A	B		ED-P16. Brownfields. Pursue and distribute funding and technical assistance to assess, clean up, and reuse brownfields.		

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<i>Plan Alternative</i>				<i>Partnership Policies</i>	<i>Staff Remarks</i>	<i>Vote: R, D, M</i>
A	B			ED-P17. Job Growth. Collaborate with economic development entities in the region to promote job growth, technical innovations, and entrepreneurship in base and emerging industries.		
A	B			ED-P18. Workforce. Work with the education and private sectors to promote education, vocational training, professional development, and lifelong learning.		
A	B			ED-P19. Cities and Counties. Collaborate with cities and neighboring counties to identify and implement regional economic initiatives that benefit base and emerging industries.		
A	B			ED-P20. Child Care. Foster private/public partnerships with child care service and information providers.		
<i>Plan Alternative</i>				<i>Implementation Measures</i>	<i>Staff Remarks</i>	<i>Vote: R, D, M</i>
A	B			ED-IM1. Ordinances. Update ordinances related to economic development for consistency with the uses of base and emerging industries.		
A	B			ED-IM2. Commercial and Industrial Sites Database Mapping. Update the Commercial and Industrial Sites Database on a two-year cycle and provide online maps of vacant industrial and commercial properties using the County’s Geographic Information System.		
A	B			ED-IM3. Broadband Deployment. Revise subdivision regulations to provide infrastructure for broadband internet.		
A	B			ED-IM4. Programs. Support technical and financial assistance programs, including delivering capital, technical expertise, and training to businesses starting up and expanding.		
A	B	C		ED-IM5. Streamlining. Provide regular review and improvement of ordinances and permit processes to increase efficiency and reduce permit processing times for strategic targets such as, but not limited to, microenterprises, home based-businesses, and workforce housing.		

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A	B		ED-IM6. Child Care. Investigate and support financing tools that leverage public and private funding to increase the establishment, rehabilitation, expansion, and viability of child care facilities.		
A	B		ED-IM7. Informed Public. Conduct and public economic research relating to emerging markets, innovations, and opportunities in which the region may have competitive advantages.		