



Monday, Oct 20, 2008

Posted on Mon, Oct. 20, 2008

## **SLO Regional Rideshare kicks off carpool week**

### **Tonya Strickland**

Even as gasoline prices plunge dramatically from their summer record highs, San Luis Obispo Regional Rideshare is still pushing people to leave their cars at home to bike, walk or share a ride this week.

The five-day event, which includes community promotions through Friday, is designed to help locals ease into alternative commuting choices.

"It's all about sustainability," said Morgen Marshall, rideshare manager, noting she saw a spike of local rideshare interest in the summer when a gallon of regular unleaded hovered near \$4.75.

The average price of a gallon of regular unleaded stood at \$3.34 on Friday in San Luis Obispo County, according to AAA.

That's \$1.31 less than it was in June, and it's as low as \$3.25 at some stations in San Luis Obispo County.

Still, though gas costs less, local alternative transportation advocates don't want to see those who made behavior changes in the summer to revert to single-driver habits.

Rideshare week is about "keeping people going—not tapering off and going back to what's comfortable," Marshall said.

And, they still think the demand for alternative transportation is there.

To date, 2,347 people have used the group's TripLink system, a program that links people to carpools, vanpools and bike to work buddies, since it was established in June 2007.

And, alternative transportation choices largely hit the mainstream in the summer when public transit systems, in area cities and those that run into the county, saw increases in ridership over past years.

Demand grew by nearly 10 percent across all public transit agencies from July 2007 to the end of June 2008, said Eliane Guillot, transportation planner with the San Luis Obispo Council of Governments.

Data since June was unavailable.

Regional buses, for example, carried more than 450,000 passengers in that time period—a 17 percent increase over the previous year.

Cycling's popularity grew in the summer, too, as shop owners cited increased sales stock and interest expanded in the San Luis Obispo County Bike Coalition.

Marshall thinks those choices will stick with people, saying they just have to give it a try.

“People are saying ‘the first time I took the bus I hated it, then the second time it was OK, and then now I can’t see how I’d get around without it,’ ” she added.

In addition to helping people save money, the benefits of not driving alone also include reducing road congestion, environmental impact and parking demand, Marshall said.

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