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Survey: More people walking and biking in Marin

By Jim Staats
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The number of people getting around Marin by pedal power or their own two feet has jumped in the past decade, according to a county survey of pathways.

Weekday bicycling rates have increased 118 percent since 1999 and the number of pedestrians has risen 51 percent in that same period, based on counts taken for a federally funded pilot program designed to encourage bicycle and pedestrian transportation.

The number of weekend bicyclists increased 125 percent between 1999 and 2009 while weekend walking in the county went up 5 percent in the past decade, the survey found.

"This shows there has been a major increase in bicycling during this time period," said Deb Hubsmith, advocacy director of the Marin County Bicycle Coalition. "There were increases in all areas, but bicycling increases were the greatest."

The findings were computed using manual counts taken at 22 sites throughout Marin during peak weekday and weekend hours over a two-week period in the fall. A 1999 count at many of the same sites resumed on an annual basis in 2007 after Marin was selected as one of four communities in the United States for the pilot program.

As part of the program, the county received \$25 million for bike paths and other improvements aimed at increasing biking and foot traffic.

Craig Tackabery, assistant public works director for the county, said recently completed projects financed through the program include the Los Ranchitos bike lane near North San Pedro Road in San

Rafael and sidewalk improvements on Medway Road in San Rafael. Construction crews are continuing work on bike lanes along Alameda del Prado in Novato, he said.

In the past couple of years, weekday bicycling has increased 23 percent while weekend bicycling has increased 60 percent, the survey said. Walking during weekdays has risen 13 percent from 2007 to 2009 while weekend walking has gone up 28 percent during that time.

"As we continue to improve our bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure, more and more Marin residents are discovering that bicycling and walking can be an easy, fun and healthy way to get around our communities," said Marin Supervisor Hal Brown.

Hubsmith said the higher numbers could be attributed to a growing interest in healthy lifestyles and helping the environment along with rising gas prices.

She expected more increases in 2010 with several new projects including the Cal Park Hill Tunnel between San Rafael and Larkspur and bike lanes near Lincoln Avenue in San Rafael and Alameda del Prado in Novato.

"There are so many improvements from the pilot program funding that are just about to be finalized over the next year, I would expect the 2010 numbers will be going up even more considerably than in recent years," she said.

To view the Marin County bike and pedestrian report, visit www.walkbikemarin.org

Contact Jim Staats via e-mail at jstaats@marinj.com

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