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EXTERNAL

Good Morning Planning Commission Members—

At next Monday's meeting on the Local Coastal Plan please launch an effort to improve conditions on high visitor days.

People traveling to the Sonoma Coast should be alerted when parking will be scarce. Residents of coastal towns will benefit if enough visitors decide to travel to less crowded locations.

At Yosemite and other major destinations, visitors are required to make advance reservations. While the Sonoma Coast cannot depend on federal funding, there are options for the Sonoma Coast.

We can align the coastal plan with State and local environmental actions by developing a well-publicized parking reservation program to advise visitors where they can find places to park and warn them when various parking areas are full. The number of parking places serving sensitive areas can be limited by their carrying capacity for visitors.

If visitors are enabled to reserve parking spaces at the larger destinations, they can know there is space for them.

Publicizing the status of major locations can alert people when parking places are likely to be scarce.

Developing a workable plan for reserved parking will take some effort; the time to start is now.

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Close to Home: Controlling traffic at the coast



Cars crowd the parking lot at Bodega Head on Labor Day weekend in 2020. (ALVIN A.H. JORNADA / The Press Democrat)

SHIRLEY JOHNSON AND JIM SULLIVAN

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The Sonoma Coast is a gem and a magnet for visitors. But enjoyment of coastal attractions is damaged by the overcrowding that is typical nearly every weekend and is especially dangerous on Memorial Day, Labor Day and the Fourth of July.

We see cars parked on the shoulder of the road and people trampling vegetation to reach beach destinations. Some visitors spend most of the day tied up in traffic, unable to reach their destination.

The towns of Bodega Bay and Jenner are particularly vulnerable. We hear of residents who buy helicopter insurance in case they have a health emergency during an all-day bumper-to-bumper traffic jam.

Yet there are proposals to add more parking spaces to “improve access” to beaches. When do we find a way to follow the example of the Muir Woods shuttle and encourage visitors to leave their cars inland?

The Sonoma County Planning Commission is now engaged in the process of updating the local coastal plan. This is an opportunity to confront the need for a policy that will reduce traffic and save the coast for future generations.

First, we can acknowledge that coastal access points and viewpoints north of the Golden Gate Bridge have limited capacity for visitors. The environmental constraints for each point can be defined, with strategies to prevent damage to habitat, vegetation and surroundings.

Second, we can recognize that Highway 1 is an eligible “scenic highway” and will never be widened to invite more traffic. For the safety of cyclists and other users, it is desirable to lower speed limits and install all-way stop signs at intersections so drivers can easily enter and leave the highway.

Third, we can align the coastal plan with state and local environmental actions by developing a well-publicized parking reservation program to advise visitors where they can find places to park and warn them when various parking areas are full. The number of parking places serving sensitive areas can be limited by their carrying capacity for visitors.

Fourth, electric bicycles are becoming commonplace. They can reduce automobile traffic but need speed limits, so they don’t frighten pedestrians. Development of safe routes for cyclists and pedestrians can be assisted by the county’s Vision Zero project, which aims to eliminate traffic fatalities and serious injuries.

We can prevent overcrowding and destruction of coastal attractions if we understand the importance of doing so.

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