

DRAFT Recommendations from the Mendocino County Climate Action Advisory Committee (MCCAAC) to the Mendocino Council of Governments (MCOG)

Introduction

The MCCAAC was formed in 2019. Our purpose is to address the crisis of climate change and implement policies and actions to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, increase carbon storage and prepare County residents to deal with local climate caused disasters. An all-volunteer board with a tiny budget, we have been meeting monthly and working hard to meet this ambitious agenda. We believe that with increased awareness and concern, it is incumbent on government agencies to treat climate change as the emergency that it is.

The following is a list of transportation-related recommendations we feel would go a long way towards improving air quality, maximizing safety for pedestrians and bicyclists and increasing awareness of what County residents can do to reduce the risk of climate change. Some of these recommendations are inexpensive and easily achieved while others can be considered a “wish list” requiring significant funding. We would be delighted to speak with your staff or board members in more detail about any or all of our recommendations.

1. Encourage More Extensive Walking and Bicycling

Organizations like Walk & Bike Mendocino have been doing great work encouraging children and adults to walk and ride their bikes more. Venues like the Great Redwood Trail have afforded opportunities to ride without encountering motor vehicles. But our downtown cities can be dangerous for bike riders, particularly children. Bike lanes are few and far between and some (e.g., Gobbi Street in Ukiah) are not wide enough. More safe bike lanes on busy streets would go a long way towards encouraging residents to bike instead of drive. Grant funding through the State Department of Transportation could be sought for more bike and pedestrian paths.

Bike sharing or rental racks in downtown areas would offer employees and visitors to our cities who do not have bicycles with them the opportunity to park their cars and get around via bicycle to do errands or explore. Bike sharing facilities could also be provided at electric-vehicle charging stations.

Carpooling or bicycle riding to work or school could be encouraged by offering prizes and incentives. For many years, Low Gap Road in Ukiah at school drop-off and pick-up times has been a mess of a traffic jam with most drivers transporting only one child. Those (few) students who walk or ride their bicycles often arrive at school faster than those sitting in a very slow-moving vehicle. Arranging carpools for students and employees who must drive from outlying areas will certainly require some planning and flexibility but can be done!

In general, we would like to see provision of adequate staff and funding to develop non-motorized transportation infrastructure projects within the various communities around the county.

We also recommend that MCOG work with the cities, counties, and public land owners to increase street trees that provide shade to make walking a more comfortable choice.

2. Encourage Cleaner Driving

Unfortunately, we see widespread vehicle idling, i.e., drivers sitting in their vehicles with the engines running while parked. This causes foolish and wholly unnecessary carbon dioxide emissions, a leading contributor of climate change. It also emits harmful chemicals into the air we breathe. Due to advances in technology, letting a vehicle idle for more than 10 seconds burns more fuel than turning it off and restarting. Particularly troubling is that many loving parents and guardians engage in this dangerous practice when picking up their children from schools. An education campaign in the schools and in workplaces could go a long way towards ending this unfortunate practice.

Similarly, we have many drive-thru businesses in the County – fast food, coffee, pharmacies, banks, etc. Except for people with mobility challenges, it is not necessary for able-bodied folks to sit in their idling vehicles instead of going inside a business. Now that the pandemic is winding down, there is often no reason for consumers to use drive-thrus other than for personal convenience. We would like to see a moratorium on approval of more drive-thrus and encouragement of consumers to no longer idle in their vehicles while awaiting a service.

On that same note, we often see idling vehicles at Cal Trans construction sites. Signage asking motorists to turn off their cars while waiting at these sites would be a great step.

Our County is in desperate need of more Level 3 electric vehicle charging stations. We understand that has become a priority for MCOG. In addition to encouraging and accommodating owners of EV's, we need those fast-charging stations so we do not continue to lose precious tourist dollars from EV owners traveling through our cities. Unfortunately, the Level 2 chargers are so slow that most travellers do not have the time to wait over 7 hours for a charge. We also recommend exploring possible partnerships to develop shade structures topped with photovoltaics to assure that the increased demand for electricity for e-vehicles is paired with renewable energy generation.

3. Coordination and Outreach with Other Agencies and Organizations

We live in a County with many active and well-informed residents very concerned about the specter of climate change. These group members are anxious to share their views. Engagement with groups such as the MCCAAC, Climate Action Mendocino (CAM), a Ukiah-based grassroots group, and the Municipal Advisory Councils (MACs) throughout the County would welcome discussion with MCOG.

We see that MCOG has been actively seeking input from County residents for its Regional Transportation Plan (RTP). One of us attempted to submit a completed survey

twice but encountered glitches with the submit button. She called the MCOG office to request technical assistance, was told someone would get in touch with her but did not receive a return call.

4. Encourage More Virtual Meetings to Reduce Vehicle Travel

While we are undoubtedly excited to begin meeting in-person post-pandemic, one of the unexpected “gifts” of our time of staying at home was a marked reduction in vehicle travel. Certainly, Zoom meetings get tiresome but they have given us the ability to reduce our carbon footprints by driving less. These plans for the future require thoughtful discussion regarding balancing our need for human contact with our responsibility to cut down on greenhouse gas emissions.