

California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo

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Cal Poly must do more to put brakes on vehicle traffic

BY WILLIAM RIGGS, PhD

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Line upon line of single-occupancy vehicles — that's what I used to see on my walk to Cal Poly each day. At first, I didn't give it much thought. But after asking my city planning students, I was shocked to hear they perceived that most of these cars were driven by students; students driving less than a mile to campus. Many of them disclosed that their friends and roommates would drive to my class in the Kennedy Library from the recently constructed dormitories at Poly Canyon Village. They would drive to class from an on-campus dorm.

After I got over my initial shock, it made sense. Students who live on campus can easily obtain a campus parking permit and drive on campus and around town contributing to traffic, congestion and emissions. And since my research focuses on sustainable transportation behavior, my immediate next thought was, "Why does it have to be that way?"

On campus, I frequently hear talk about sustainability and high density, mixed-use housing, but why do we not address the elephant in the room: cars and parking? Why don't we talk about the number of cars on campus and why are we not doing a better job incentivizing biking and walking for students, let alone faculty and staff?

Now that Cal Poly has plans to provide for 1,475 beds off Grand Avenue, all I can think about is all the cars. Based on my experience as an academic and planning professional, unless bundled with aggressive transportation measures, this housing may be hugely burdensome on the community. The campus already contributes to the bulk of traffic in the area, and such development designed for cars and unmitigated could exacerbate that. Providing for cars can be very expensive, and it is something other campuses have decided not to pursue. Before coming to Cal Poly, I was the lead campus transportation planner for UC Berkeley and, based on the expense of new parking structures, (between \$40,000 and \$60,000 per space when amortized over the typical structure life) it was neither fiscally responsible nor a good use of taxpayer dollars to construct parking.

Instead we chose a policy that limited the ability for any students living on campus to have a car.

In addition, we limited the ability of students living within two miles of campus to get a parking permit. By bundling this policy with an unlimited transit pass, car sharing for incidental shopping trips and cycling and walking improvements, we were able to achieve a non-automotive mode split of roughly 91 percent. This meant that only 9 percent of the close to 35,000 students were using cars to go to and from campus.

There are countless examples of university communities in the United States and internationally that have implemented similar policies. While the city of San Luis Obispo is taking aggressive steps to move in that direction as a part of updates to the Land Use and Circulation Elements, these efforts are not being matched by the campus — and this is at a time where the increase in student population necessitates it. Some might argue that students need cars to get to campus, or that traffic and congestion issues are typical in a college town. I don't buy this logic. San Luis Obispo is a highly connected environment with an easily accessible airport and rail/transit system. Cal Poly should follow the lead of many campuses throughout the country that limit student car ownership for on-campus housing and incentive alternative modes of transport.

As members of the San Luis Obispo community, we need to ask that the campus take aggressive steps to curb auto trips — something that should not be limited just to students. With all the growth that is projected, if we as community members are to have a future that is not dominated by line upon line of automobiles, then Cal Poly must do more.

William Riggs is an assistant professor in Cal Poly's Department of City and Regional Planning.

Read more here: http://www.sanluisobispo.com/2014/02/03/2906283_cal-poly-must-to-do-more-to-put.html