

Santa Barbara City Council Candidate Questionnaire on Transportation

Brought to you by the Community Environmental Council, Coalition for Sustainable Transportation, and Santa Barbara Bicycle Coalition.

Sharon Byrne

- 1. Do you agree with the City's Circulation Element vision statement, "Santa Barbara should be a city in which alternative forms of transportation and mobility are so available and so attractive that use of an automobile is a choice, not a necessity"? If not, how would you improve it?**

I support alternative forms of transportation, and I live in West Downtown so I could have a walkable lifestyle, where I could walk to State St easily for dinner and farmer's market visits. I have to report, though, that it's often an unpleasant experience due to safety issues, though I do a lot of work in that area. I have had to work in San Francisco and Los Angeles as part of my career, and that has necessitated a car, though I chose a hybrid in 2005, and love it. What I would like to see is appropriate re-engineering of streets here, that were mostly built out between 1920 and 1960, that accommodates all three forms of transportation safely. I have seen boulevard designs in Vienna and other cities where there is accommodation, cleanly, for walking, bicycling, and autos, and it works well. Even Europe did not try to abandon the auto because they understand that people use autos, electric streetcars, bikes and they walk. For streets like Milpas, which was clearly a 1950's design, we could re-engineer the street to remove on-street parking, relegate it paid parking lots (use the lot next to Superica, some of the parking at Scolari's – they're willing to rent it, and the old Milpas Post Office – very underused at present). Then we could have an electric shuttle that takes shoppers up and down the street to do their business. We could wide the sidewalks out (they're one-person wide at present) and install a bike lane with the room we get from the removal of on-street parking. With 30,000 unique car trips daily, and a major highway 101 interchange, we have to be able to accommodate car traffic, but could design the street in such a way that pedestrians and bicyclists can enjoy it and use it more than they can today. These kinds of solutions, that integrate ALL transportation needs safely and smartly, are what I see. Having said that, I recognize that gas-powered vehicles are about to become historical, at least in the next 30 years, but I suspect electric vehicles will be their replacement. Given that, you have to plan for people to still have cars in the future. We're not constrained by 15th century roads and canals, like Amsterdam, so we have to be reasonable in planning transportation needs.

- 2. Given that dangerous walking condition exist in Santa Barbara's Eastside, what might you do to make the Eastside a safer place to walk - more lighting, re-pavement of crosswalks, speed bumps, more police enforcement, or something else?**

As the executive director of the Milpas Community Association, I work a lot on this problem. We've advocated for signal lights for pedestrian crossings at Ortega and Yanonali. This is the solution Goleta uses on Calle Real, and it works, because cars have to stop for pedestrians. Right now, those intersections are quite dangerous. We've applied for funding to do this through the Franklin Advisory Committee, on which I sit. That gets it into the RDA / CDBG funding process. We've also had the police put in the flashing speed checkers because the speed limit is 30MPH on Milpas, and many cars are going a lot faster. We've had trees trimmed

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on the lower Eastside to make the streetlights more visible at night for those walking the area – it's become quite dangerous in the past year. We've also requested enforcement for speeders in the area. The Eastside is a vast neighborhood, with many pedestrian / traffic concerns, and for each situation, something fairly unique is required. It's by no means a one-size fits all type of policy decision. We approach these situations with a head for 'what would work here to make this more safe', and we work with several different tools to increase pedestrian safety.

3. Is it the City's duty to improve the jobs/housing imbalance in Santa Barbara? If so, what would you have the City do to accomplish this? If not, how can this imbalance be best addressed?

This is a thorny question whose root lies in the city's economics. We don't make planes, cars, or other heavy manufacturing products where high employment is generated. We also don't have a high-tech industry of any size, a financial industry, or other white-collar industries that generate a lot of employment. We're mainly a tourist town with a lot of businesses that support workers in that industry, like grocery stores, barbershops, etc. That means families wanting homes with yards and a dog, and long-term employment might not find it here, and that's life here, in Nantucket Island, Jekyll island, and other small tourist destinations. They're simply not going to be urban metropolis areas that can generate significant employment and housing. Having said that, the housing available to people here with a job (such as the home I rent) are in pretty poor condition because landlords have no incentive to renovate their properties. I do think the city can provide housing for low income families, and does so with RDA funding. But it's my understanding that some of the neighborhoods zoned in Plan Santa Barbara for high-density housing, such as mine, would displace long-term families that have lived here multi-generationally. I am not sure that's a good thing for our families. High-density zoning also raises property taxes, which means some families and small businesses will no longer be able to maintain their property, and have to sell out to developers who will then build projects on the site. I don't favor pushing people out to provide housing, when I don't see an economic and employment picture that supports it.

4. Please list three specific things you would prioritize to improve our regional transportation. How would you pay for them? How long would it take to accomplish them?

No city council person really has this sort of authority, other than to support state / regional initiatives. There is one priority that would be quite useful. Many families live in Ventura, and work here. Other families live here, and work in Ventura, Oxnard, Port Hueneme, or other places. I have had to commute to Los Angeles twice a week for employment, and also to San Francisco. The current Metrolink route goes from LA to Ventura, and stops. Amtrak is both schedule unfriendly, unreliable and expensive. I used to drive 37 miles to the Metrolink station in Ventura, and commute (1.5 hours) to Los Angeles. One thing that would reduce the congestion on the 101 is to have a Metrolink station here in Santa Barbara. It's a faster train, built for commuters, costs half the price of an Amtrak ticket for the same route, and would get many cars off the road between here and Los Angeles. The problem is Metrolink is funded by

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Los Angeles transportation authority, so some serious lobbying and traffic studies would be required to justify it, and we might have to eat the cost of the addition to the route. But it would do a great deal to allow people to commute further for work, without clogging the highways, and be more fuel efficient as well.

5. Do you support the State of California's goals for new and retrofitted "net zero energy" buildings that generate as much energy as they use? If so, how can the City be a leader and help its citizens meet this challenge? If not, why?

I LOVE this idea and have seen it in action, though admittedly in Santa Monica. People are buying homes in industrial or warehousing districts with home offices in them to cut off their commutes, building them to have desert gardens (no water usage), solar power (no electricity usage, and they sell the power they generate in excess back to the power companies), and doors that open to enable an indoor / outdoor space, with air circulation coming in naturally. I'd love to see more of these type of projects, and the city could help by offering a break on property taxes proportionate to the amount a homeowner or building owner spends on refitting. Coal generation of power, along with nuclear, are not environmentally friendly. We need to do something different, and this is great. There is solar paint as well that can be applied to rooftops, yet there is no dealer here to sell it or do the work. Businesses that start up here to do the refitting could be given breaks on licensing fees by the city, and lowered barriers to entry, so they can more easily enter the market and service clients that want to do this work. These would help us quickly establish leadership in this area, and I'd love to make that happen, in addition to generating jobs for this area, that are sustainable for years as buildings convert.

6. Given projections of increased traffic levels in Santa Barbara, how would you best mitigate our upcoming street congestion?

With a declining population, according to the US census, I am not sure the projections are valid. However, the population we do have here, especially in the city itself, need autos. Construction workers can't bike with tools. Gardeners can't bike with their large equipment. We have a lot of working class families in the city, and they often have multiple vehicles to support their businesses, which congests our streets. Strangely enough, I could be persuaded to give up my car if a) there was another way to get my kid to school through a dangerous district in the city, b) the liveable walkable downtown was a reality (it isn't, due to safety concerns), and c) there were markets nearby to support the residents. That means there are at least a couple of things that SEEM unrelated to decreasing congestion, but are necessary. The first is public safety. People don't want to walk in areas that are perceived as unsafe, or uncomfortable. The lower downtown area is not perceived as safe, or very nice to walk. Two, there is little school bussing here, which means parents drive kids to school. I have occasionally put my daughter (Jr High student) on the electric cross-town shuttle, but the stop placements mean she has to walk part of the Haley corridor to get to and from home, and it's not safe. There is no market downtown – all we have is liquor stores. So I have to drive to Trader Joe's on Milpas to get food. All of these things keep me tied to a car, and I imagine all of us living in town have this issue. To get

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us out of our cars then requires a safe, walkable city, and markets placed in neighborhoods that can sustain the residents' shopping needs. I'd work hard on both fronts to make that happen. Chapala One sits vacant, yet the first floor is PERFECT for a small Trader Joe's or Von's. Why can't we have one? Everyone would walk over there. The upper Eastside has the same issue. Cantwell's is the only market close, and is not suitable for anything but quick purchases. If we want more people to leave cars, then you have to have a city plan that gives them a reasonable option to do that, and we don't at present.