

Bike to Work events are growing in valley

By Deke Farrow

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STANISLAUS COUNTY -- With three Stanislaus County cities adding Bike to Work Day events this year, organizers hope more people will get off the fence and get on their bicycles.

Modesto's annual event began in 1997 and has grown from dozens of participants to 100-plus. This year, it will be held Friday, as will Turlock's first Bike to Work Day. Next week, Oakdale and Patterson launch their inaugural events. All are tied to National Bike to Work Week, May 13-17.

"It's pretty exciting — a lot of the smaller communities have gotten on board this year," said Kari McNickle, a regional planner with the San Joaquin Council of Governments. "It's a result of coordination between the cities, the businesses and the bicycling enthusiasts."

Every year since Modesto launched its Bike to Work Day, participation has increased, McNickle said, but there's a long way to go to get more people pedaling more often. One group to win over is the "concerned but interested population," she said. "It's the portion of the population that would consider biking to work but have concerns about safety, time, whether they'll get sweaty."

To a great extent, safety is in cyclists' hands: Follow rules of the road; be aware of traffic; use a helmet and reflective wear; and ride a bike outfitted with reflectors and lights.

As for time, lots of people regularly hit the gym, so getting a workout on the way to and from the workplace could replace some of that, McNickle said. And the sweat? Some workplaces have showers, and some gyms and fitness centers offer just a "shower membership," she said. She suggests that reluctant riders "start small, try getting dropped off at work and riding home. Try it on a day off, just as a casual ride."

Every rider finds his or her own motivation.

Dennis Rubalcaba of Salida posted on The Bee's Facebook page, "I ride to work every day from Salida to Ripon. All due to the climbing cost of gas, plus it was a way to lose a few pounds. I've lost 20 since the first of the year." He said his daily ride is "about 13 miles round trip, and I'm coming up on two years."

Turlock resident Dan England, a senior civil engineer for the city of Modesto, was driven to biking by his daughter's need for his car. For more than two years, his day has begun with a 1½-mile bike ride to the bus stop. The bus drops him in downtown Modesto, where he takes a short bike ride to the office. It's not a lot of exercise, but he's doing his part to cut auto emissions. And he's spending less on gas. "I think about that all the time. There's definitely a cost savings."

As for a health benefit, "I'd like to think there is," said England, 50. "In good weather, about once a week I ride home all the way (11 miles) for the exercise and enjoyment."

The goal of Bike to Work Week is to encourage commuters to try biking (or walking) to work. By pledging to ride instead of drive one day a week, commuters are eligible to win prizes — and enjoy the rewards of a car-free commute. Here's a look at local events:

Modesto

Friday's celebration is at Tenth Street Plaza from 6:30 to 8:30 a.m. All bicycle commuters will get a continental breakfast, and the first 150 to arrive will get a free T-shirt. Cyclists who really want to make an entrance can join the police-escorted Ride With the Mayor, which will begin at 7:15 a.m. at Plantation Coffee, at Floyd and Roselle avenues.

Turlock

Bike your way to the Friday Farmers Market for prizes and giveaways. The celebration is from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m. in front of City Hall, 156 S. Broadway.

Oakdale

Join fellow bike commuters, get freebies and visit vendors behind the Oakdale Bicycle Shop, 445 E. F St. The event is from 6:30 to 9:30 a.m. Tuesday.

Newman

There will be prizes, refreshments and vendors downtown on May 16 from 7 to 9:30 a.m.

Patterson

Refreshments and vendor gifts will be offered in South Park downtown on May 17. Hours are 7 to 10 a.m.

[Fresno Bee editorial, Wed., May 8, 2013:](#)

Valley must adapt to impacts of climate change

It's going to be a dry, ugly summer. We're only in May and fires have begun erupting around the state. Our reservoirs aren't close to capacity and they won't get help from the remaining snowpack.

Climate change has created a "new normal" that is far from easy to predict. Scientists tell us to prepare for extremes. By this, they mean extreme events far beyond what is "normal" in a state known for its disastrous wildfires, droughts, floods and mudslides.

Earlier this year, the U.S. Global Change Research Program released a draft of its Climate Assessment Report. It noted that the Southwestern United States, including California, has heated up markedly in recent decades.

"The period since 1950 has been hotter than any comparable period in at least 600 years," the report stated, citing more than 10 studies.

Climate models -- not absolute proof, but the best tools available for forecasting the future -- show that annual average temperatures in the Southwest are projected to rise 2 to 6 degrees Fahrenheit by 2041-2070 even if global emissions of greenhouse gases are substantially reduced.

The Climate Assessment Report warns that the Southwest should prepare for decreased snowpack and stream flows, meaning reduced water for cities, agriculture and fisheries.

It predicts serious impacts on high-value crops, stronger flood events and more extreme high tides. And it warns that, with 90% of the Southwest's population living in urban areas, heat waves will claim an ever-higher toll.

California has been a leader in reducing greenhouse gases through cleaner cars, energy efficiency, conservation and a law requiring a reduction in emissions. But adaptation has to be an equal part of the strategy.

Overall, and especially on the local and regional level, public officials aren't taking seriously the need to prepare their communities for the kind of extreme events that are inevitable with a changing climate.

These extremes -- and the responses to them -- vary depending on where Californians live.

In the Central Valley, authorities must prepare communities for flooding evacuations and protracted heat waves that are particularly brutal, especially for the elderly and infirm.

In coastal areas, sea level rise is projected to increase, and flooding and erosion already are occurring in places where houses were built too close to the water, or too close to cliffs.

In Southern California and the foothills, wildfires are the primary threat, and the unrestrained construction of suburban homes in wildfire zones complicates the task of first responders.

California has developed a "climate change adaptation strategy" that is thoughtful and comprehensive, including a tool called "Cal-Adapt" that allows local officials to better understand projected impacts to their communities.

Local leaders need to read this report and take the threats seriously. To adapt to a changing climate, cities and counties will have to be proactive in planning for more extreme floods, droughts and fires, even if it means changing their general plans that were developed under the "old normal."