

Study finds 60% of Marin work force commutes; housing prices to blame

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MARIN COUNTY — Nearly 60 percent of people who work in Marin commute in from outside the county, farther on average than any other workforce in the Bay Area, according to a report by Live Local Marin, a special initiative of the Non-Profit Housing Association of Northern California and Greenbelt Alliance.

The report, Miles From Home, indicates that cumulatively, Marin's driving workforce puts an extra 2.37 million pounds of carbon emissions into the air each day. Marin's lack of affordable housing is cited as a primary cause, with two-thirds of Marin workers earning less than the \$56,000 per year needed to afford to rent a one-bedroom apartment.

"While traffic problems are nothing new," said Dianne Spaulding, executive director of Non Profit Housing, "what we found is that, contrary to public belief, the traffic on 101 in Marin is not just due to people passing through, it is made up mostly of workers trying to get to their jobs in Marin. And, more importantly, more than half of these in-commuters earn less than \$40,000 per year. That's not enough to rent even a 1-bedroom apartment in Marin. Is it any wonder they need to commute long distances? We're talking about workers like paramedics, kindergarten teachers and child care workers."

Live Local Marin is calling on cities and the county to zone for more homes affordable to people who already work in Marin, so that they can live closer to where they work and drive less.

"Marin has a great legacy of environmentalism with more permanently protected parks, farms, and wetlands than any other Bay Area county," said Jeremy Madsen, executive director of Greenbelt Alliance. "But to create a truly sustainable county, Marin will need to provide affordable homes that allow workers to drive shorter distances. That's one of Marin's best ways to reduce its carbon footprint."

The report finds that commutes to Marin have increased and traffic worsened as home costs have risen, all while Marin's economy has shifted to lower-paying retail and service sector jobs. However, according to the report, this shift in the economy was not matched by the creation of homes priced for moderate-wage workers. In fact, the study found that 77 percent of houses constructed between 1999 and 2006 were priced for households earning \$80,000 or more per year. Only 11 percent of the county's workforce can afford housing at that price.

Over the next five years, it is projected that 65 percent of jobs created in Marin will be in low-paying sectors further widening the gap between supply and demand.

"We're trending in the wrong direction. We have to turn this train around and we have chance to do it now," said report author Robert Hickey, Non-Profit Housing's Marin program manager. "Marin has a long history of creating beautiful, safe and affordable homes for its workforce."

"The Miles from Home report will go a long way toward raising awareness about the urgent need for housing affordable to Marin's workers," said League of Women Voters of Marin County President, Margy Eller. "It underscores what the League has long stood for: development has to be planned carefully to address and meet the need of all sectors of our community. We know the solutions to housing, employment and transportation issues will reduce regional vehicle miles traveled and greenhouse gas emissions. This report shows we can no longer afford to wait to achieve those goals."

Live Local Marin will be conducting a tour of affordable workforce housing on Saturday, March 5, 9 a.m. to 2 p.m., starting at 1385 N. Hamilton Parkway, in Novato.

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