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Gridlock Grind

"AMERICA'S WORST COMMUTES" cover story [May 7] told it like it is. There may be a partial solution that wasn't mentioned. Carpools help a lot, though it's hard to link up with people going from the same point A to point B at a regular time. What if strangers rode with strangers? It happens now in unique situations, specifically across the San Francisco Bay Bridge in what is referred to as casual carpools. Drivers and passengers get quick access to the bridge toll free and use of the carpool lane. And the system takes cars off the road and could work for most any commute.

LYMAN TAYLOR
San Jose, Calif.

AS A PROFESSIONAL traffic engineer, I recommend the solution of timing and coordinating traffic signals as one of the major steps to end congestion and, in turn, pollution. These are inexpensive and timely methods compared with facilities and other major solutions that take time to develop. Unfortunately, a synonym for a traffic signal is stoplight. It doesn't have to be.

JEROME D. FRANKLIN
Skokie, Ill.

"ROAD WARRIORS" STATED "THE issue mainly boils down to population growth outpacing road building." Wrong! The issue is too many developers are allowed to build offices where there are no workers and housing where there are no jobs. Taxpayers then have to fund the roads to try to get the two together while developers take their profits and do it all over again. Perhaps government finances could be partnered with office and housing developers to get the home-office within reasonable distance so our family structure can survive. The costs of highways would go a long way toward new business and housing development.

TERRY SLATON
Federal Way, Wash.

YOUR ARTICLE ON WORST COMMUTES overlooks the best method of curing this problem. Just disperse the job sites. Why in this age of high-speed communication, transportation, and overnight delivery in every hamlet do we think that

everything has to be crammed into a few huge megalopolises with all the attendant problems? If labor supply is a worry, it must be obvious that jobs attract labor as that is what is causing the present mess. Build it, and they will come! This country is blessed with vast areas in which to expand that already offer better living conditions. For example, in 1992, Sioux Falls, S.D., was rated as the best place in the country to live, yet it has enjoyed only modest, although healthy, growth.

JOHN W. LARSON
Sun City West, Ariz.

CLEARLY, A MASSIVE, Marshall Plan-size investment in road construction is necessary. Mass transit, while certainly useful in certain large metropolitan areas with sufficient population density to justify its huge financial cost (along with the massive

subsidies necessary to make it affordable to those who use it), simply cannot solve America's traffic crisis. America is paying the price for decades of neglect of its roads.

MICHAEL J. CORBIN
Faribault, Minn.

THERE WAS NO DISCUSSION OF IDEAS that would enable people to work but not commute. By encouraging and enabling people to work at home or at satellite offices, the number of commuters on the road could be dramatically decreased. The idea has been adopted by many companies, and they have call or service centers located in small cities and towns where the commute to work is minutes, not hours. In addition to less stressed employees, there are other benefits like lower business costs. It can be a major plus in large cities, where there is a preponderance of white-collar jobs.

CHRISTOPHER M. TIMM
Albuquerque, N.M.

LIVING AND COMMUTING ON THE San Francisco Bay Area peninsula, the U.S. 101 corridor, and often traveling in rush-hour traffic, I am seldom hindered by the mess. With the exception of a complete road closure, I maintain forward momentum on my motorcycle throughout my commute via legal use of the commuter high-occupancy vehicle lanes. I realize that motorcycles may be an answer for only a small percent-

age of commuters part of the time (I use mine daily), but the desire for rapid commute times should be enough to persuade many drivers to try one. Add lower initial cost and half the average fuel consumption of four-wheeled vehicles along with the fun factor, and, to me and an elite few, vehicles with more than two wheels are not an option for the daily grind.

ROB KOPE
Millbrae, Calif.

I LIVE APPROXIMATELY 14 MILES from my workplace in midtown Manhattan. Every morning my commute on public transportation, using the express bus costing twice the regular subway fare, takes me from 45 minutes to 1½ hours if I leave home between 7 and 7:30. Otherwise, it could take up to two hours or longer on the subway. I commute with my husband to make sure we spend some quality time together.

CELINA VEGA
Brooklyn, N.Y.

YOUR COVER STORY ON TRAFFIC CONGESTION makes little of the important fact that travel times in Los Angeles have dropped over the past decade, despite considerable population growth. One important reason is increasingly dispersed employment. You report that Los Angeles "is undergoing a veritable transit boom," but Los Angeles County transit ridership peaked in 1985, the year L.A. County diverted sales tax revenues from the bus fleet to a capital account to fund rail lines. Bus fares went up, ridership went down, and 22 years later total L.A. transit ridership on buses and trains has yet to recover. Los Angeles can make good use of additional transit but not of Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa's "subway to the sea."

JAMES E. MOORE II
*Professor and Chair
Daniel J. Epstein Department of
Industrial and Systems Engineering
University of Southern California
Los Angeles*

IN THE ARTICLE ABOUT GRIDLOCKED roads, the president of the American Trucking Associations, Bill Graves, was quoted as saying "there is certainly a strongly held belief . . . that roads . . . are free." The magic government wand didn't build them. Americans' taxes paid for the nation's highways, city streets, and freeways, and gas taxes are supposedly used to maintain them.

NANCY ASTIN
Corvallis, Ore.

