

Traffic problems continue to lead list of concerns

By Cheryl Downey
The Register

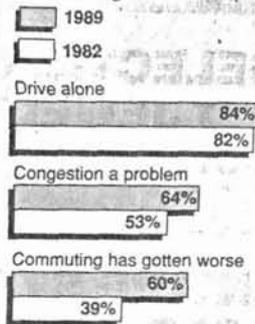
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Dale Turnell is one of the lucky ones. Or maybe she's just smart. Turnell commutes mere minutes from her home in Seal Beach to her job at Rockwell International Corp. in the same city. She pulled up to work Monday in her red Mitsubishi Eclipse, parked, and grabbed her lunch and purse. "You get here feeling like a human being instead of a snarling animal," Turnell said as she armed the car alarm after a five-minute drive. "I don't know what can be done about traffic other than limiting the people coming into Orange County." Like many others, Turnell believes traffic is the county's most pressing problem. Forty percent of those questioned in the 1989 Orange County Annual Survey conducted by the University of California, Irvine, said traffic was the county's top concern, ranking far higher than concerns about growth and housing. The concerns about traffic have climbed 7 percent since the 1985 poll. "It's obvious people are more aware of the problem of commut-

ing and traffic today than they were earlier in the decade," said Mark Baldassare, the UCI professor who conducted the survey. "But they appear to have not changed their behavior at all. We have the same proportion of people driving alone to work as we did in '82 — except we have more people. So of course we have more traffic." Sixty percent said their commute has gotten worse, up from 39 percent in 1982. And 64 percent said traffic congestion is a problem, up from 53 percent in 1982. Of the poll respondents, 84 percent drive alone — up slightly from 1982. Despite her short trip to work, Turnell said she sees traffic problems everywhere she turns. "It affects the air we breathe," she said. "It affects you if you go to South Coast Plaza to shop. Everywhere we go now, traffic is a problem." In the survey, 51 percent said the county needs new freeways and 42 percent said lanes should be added to existing freeways. Only 7 percent said the freeway system is adequate. In 1982, 32 percent of the poll respondents said the freeway system was adequate. Bob Epperson, a salesman from

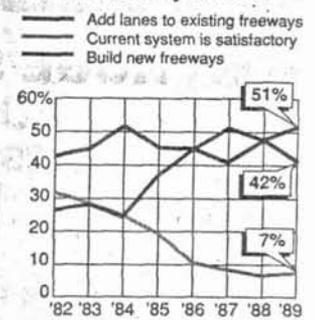
Uneasy rider

Sixty percent of Orange County residents say commuting has gotten worse; only 7 percent are satisfied with the freeway system.

Commuting trends



Trends in freeway attitudes



Source: 1989 Orange County Annual Survey, UCI

The Register

Mission Viejo who drives a 1983 Honda with 97,000 miles on it, said traffic, growth and housing all are critical although traffic probably comes out on top.

"You can't grow if you can't get anyplace," he said. "You can never depend on anything anymore. You can never tell when traffic is going to change, even on week-

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Mark Baldassare
director of the Orange County Poll

ends."

Epperson, who sells electronic components, plans his sales calls to avoid rush hour. Over the past two or three years, he said, that has become more difficult as traffic worsens and grows more unpredictable.

"I don't know where we're going to end up if it keeps up at this rate by the turn of the century," Epperson said.

Jake Brown, another Rockwell employee, arrived for work in Seal Beach a little after 7:30 a.m. He leaves his home in Rancho Santa Margarita about 6:30 a.m.

"It used to be about 50 minutes," said Brown, who moved to Rancho Santa Margarita from Huntington

All he can do is leave earlier to beat the rush, he said. Brown said the county needs to build its planned tollways — although he hates the idea of paying tolls to drive. He also favors adding car-pool lanes to existing freeways.

Brown, who is married and has three children, said he loves living in Rancho Santa Margarita. But living east of Mission Viejo means commuting for many of its residents. And they don't have to look far in south county for the reasons commuters' drives are longer and more stressful, he said.

The poll found that 57 percent of south Orange County residents favor building new freeways compared with 49 percent of residents elsewhere in the county.

1989 ORANGE COUNTY ANNUAL SURVEY

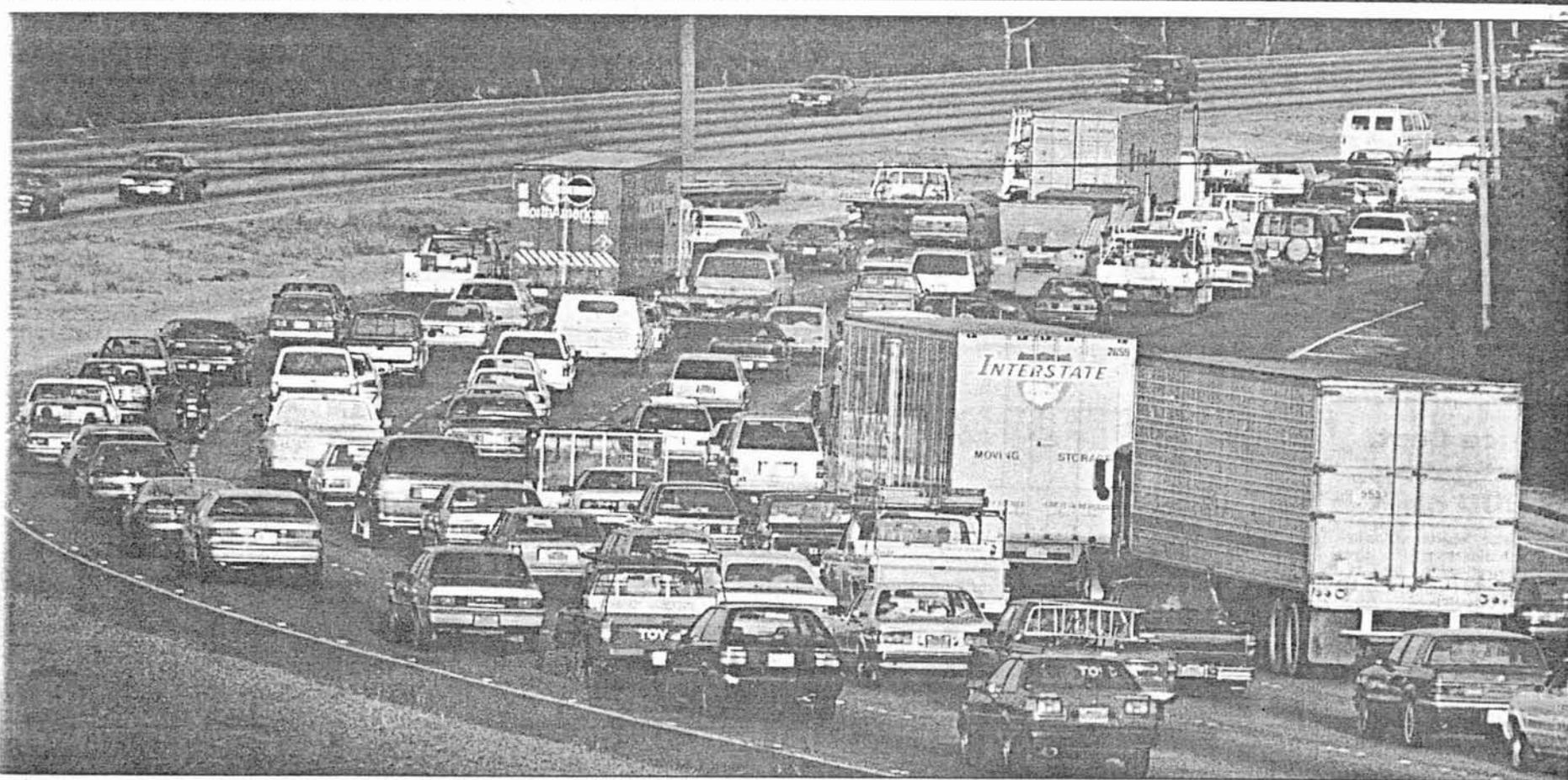


Photo taken from the Lakeview overpass shows commuter traffic mixed with commercial vehicles at the start of the afternoon rush hour on the Riverside (91) Freeway. Photo was taken at approximately 3:30 p.m. Monday

Ygnacio Nanetti/The Register