

# CONTRA COSTA TIMES

ContraCostaTimes.com

## Workers delight in extreme commutes

**Some take advantage of their passions, such as bikes and planes; others endure long drives to live in a more desirable setting**

By Sue Doyle

LOS ANGELES DAILY NEWS

Article Launched: 12/09/2007 02:59:41 AM PST

For Sparky Cohen of Simi Valley, the daily commute means climbing aboard his mountain bike before dawn at least once a week to pedal his way to his job at Calabasas City Hall.

In charge of building safety and code enforcement, the 45-year-old pushes his way up and down steep trails through Las Virgenes Canyon for two hours before even getting to work.

Using a portable camping shower that he props on the roof of his car -- which he typically leaves parked overnight at work -- Cohen cleans up and dons slacks and a tie for work.

"I don't mind to stop and smell the roses when I do my commutes," he said. "I see foxes, deer, coyote, bobcats, road runners. I see it all."

Cohen is among the ranks of 3.4 million Americans who the U.S. Census bureau says endure "extreme" commutes of 90 minutes or more.

But he also falls into an even more unique category previously unidentified by transportation

statisticians: Those who take on extreme commutes because they love it.

For Bill Halstead, that means a commute that starts about 4:30 every morning when he pulls out of his driveway at 5,600 feet above sea level in the middle of Los Padres National Forest.

By any measure, Halstead's 87-mile commute to Beverly Hills is a long haul.

But it's still shorter than wife Zandra's -- a 95-mile trek to Pasadena for her management job in accounting.

"When I tell people how far I commute, they think I'm nuts. Sometimes I have to agree with them," said Bill Halstead, a stockbroker.

"But then I show them pictures of where I live -- the snow, the icicles and the spring. And then they say, 'Oh, I see why.'"

Living in the quaint, woodsy private community of Pine Mountain Club for 17 years, the Halsteads have considered moving closer to work to save time and money.

Zandra Halstead's car is two months old and already has logged 10,000 miles. Their combined gas bill is about \$1,000 a month.

But they have found nothing as unique as the 1.75 million-acre national forest that surrounds them and supports their love for the outdoors.

Sy Cohn, a Claremont-based driving therapist, said that those who intentionally shoulder long commutes generally lead less-conventional lives and do not see the world -- or lengthy commutes -- in rigid terms of good versus bad.

# CONTRA COSTA TIMES

ContraCostaTimes.com

"There's a ... lot of gray between the black and white," he said. "Whatever things people can carve out of their lives -- when people are open to it, they're so much happier."

Extreme commutes also speak to the desire some people have to live farther from the city, said Paul Mason Fotsch, a professor at Cal State Northridge and author of "Watching the Traffic Go By: Transportation and Isolation in Urban America."

But most people still depend on economic city hubs for jobs, creating a long-standing contradiction embedded in the U.S. history of urbanization, Fotsch said.

"These people are exceptional that they have the resources to do these types of extreme commutes," he said.

"It's not like others don't desire these same things. Many people desire these lifestyles."

Experts said that such voluntary extreme commuters are realizing intangible emotional and psychological benefits from their adventures.

Their methods of getting to work reflect what they like to do rather than an imposition of what they have to do, said Tim Lomax, research engineer for the Texas Transportation Institute.

"Commuting isn't necessarily about the hour you spend on the road," he said. "It's about where you live, where you work or where you get to play on the weekends."

And with Los Angeles-area residents spending an estimated extra 72 hours a year stuck in traffic -- whether in cars or on public transit -- some have taken their extreme commutes to the skies.

After flying his aircraft into Whiteman Airport in Los Angeles from Fullerton each day, Jason Vivo jumps on a skateboard to ride about 150 feet through the parking lot to his car that he leaves parked there overnight.

From there, it's a five-mile drive to his job at United Parcel Service of America, where he delivers packages all day long on a 50-mile route between Sylmar and Burbank.

At the end of the workday, he reverses the entire 45-mile routine back to his home in Cypress.

"I just love looking down and flying over rush hour traffic and going 125 mph," Vivo said. "It feels great."

Flying to work is helping the 30-year-old accumulate the 700 hours of time he needs to log to fly jets professionally.

But recently, his plane needed engine repairs, and Vivo was forced to return to his old commuting ways -- driving through rush hour on Interstate 5, motoring along at 15 mph.

Sitting in the sea of brake lights night after night made Vivo appreciate his freedom in the air even more.

And it gave him time to ponder another change to his commute.

"There's a plane that I want to get that goes twice as fast," he said. "So my commute would be 10 minutes instead of 20."

Reach Sue Doyle at [sue.doyle@dailynews.com](mailto:sue.doyle@dailynews.com) or 818-713-3746.