Gas prices driving us mad
One city decides to fight back
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Summer nears and gas prices soar.

While many drivers say they have no choice but to pay the high price at the pump, Calabasas officials have been working on ways to reduce the city's use of gasoline.

"I cannot honestly say that I drive less because of rising gas prices," said Calabasas Mayor Pro Tem James Bozajian. "I have two jobs (deputy district attorney and city council member), both of which require quite a bit of driving on an almost daily basis. I'm a big fan of public transportation, and have regularly used the Red Line-and now the Orange Line-for many years."

"Unfortunately, a convenient network of interconnecting public transportation systems is not readily accessible to those of us living in Calabasas who commute to destinations outside the city."

Bozajian said he tries to cut back on his driving by consolidating his errands. He hopes that sufficient state and federal funding will be available someday to provide the city with more mass transit options.

Calabasas actress Kelli Garner ("The Aviator") must commute to downtown and Hollywood frequently as part of her work, and says gas prices have affected her lifestyle. Garner said she's considering the purchase of a hybrid vehicle.

Calabasas Chief Financial Officer Gary Lysik said hybrid vehicles aren't necessarily going to save you money.

"Although the gas mileage is better, the price tag of the vehicle is almost as insulting as the current price per gallon of gasoline," Lysik said.
Naomi Motohashi, who drives from the San Fernando Valley to Calabasas on a regular basis, said she does not plan to drive less because of high gas prices, but she's interested in purchasing a hybrid car for environmental reasons.

Many residents just bite the bullet and pay what's required.

"Regardless of gas prices, I still must get where I need to go," said Toby Keeler, co-chair of the Calabasas nonprofit group Spotlight the Arts. "I do not drive any less."

While Calabasas might not be able to help its commuters, the city has been very proactive in coming up with incentives to use less gasoline within its own borders.

**Take the bus**

"To help provide alternative transportation to our residents, the city plans on further expanding the public transit program," said Calabasas Associate Transportation Planner Tom Gdala. He called the expansion a work in progress, which includes:

+ Addition of two fixed city bus routes to serve the areas around Calabasas High School and A.C. Stelle Middle School.

+ Expansion of two existing city bus routes to further serve areas around Lupin Hill and Bay Laurel elementary schools.

+ Expansion of the city's Line 1 bus route to the west side of the city to provide hourly local service throughout Calabasas.

According to Gdala, ridership on Calabasas' city buses was strong prior to the recent surge in gas prices. The city encourages bus ridership not only to reduce fuel consumption, but also to reduce Calabasas traffic.

**Walk, don't drive**

In another attempt to save on gasoline usage, Calabasas has been promoting Walk to School Wednesdays for the past few years. International Walk to School Week, which takes place in October, has been popular for many years as well.

"School newsletters continue to ask students to walk, and schools do appear to have more walkers now than in years past," Gdala said. "Other pedestrian related improvements continue to occur each year to further promote the walking program."

Gdala said the city has hired crossing guards for new locations and will hire another for Lupin Hill Elementary at Parkmor Road.

"This should make parents more comfortable dropping their kids off at the bottom of the hill and (letting them) walk up," he said.
The city has installed a flashing crosswalk on Mulholland Highway and plans to install more.

"We've made pedestrian ramp improvements and (improvements at) a roundabout near A.C. Stelle by pushing the crosswalks farther away from the intersection," Gdala said. "(We) plan to similarly improve the other four roundabouts the same (way)."

To increase safety and control for walkers, the city installed a traffic signal on Parkway Cala-basas at Bay Laurel Elementary School.

"We've even tried pedestrian flags at Camino Portal," Gdala said. "We're making Calabasas safer to walk."

**Hybrid vehicles**

Calabasas has been proactive in using alternate fuels and hybrid technologies to power the city's vehicles.

Officials recently purchased a hybrid vehicle for city use and will probably buy another soon, said Gdala.

**CNG vehicles**

The city has saved money by using municipal vehicles that run on compressed natural gas (CNG), according to Gdala. The prices for CNG is $2.39 per gallon—regular unleaded fuel is now about $3.15 per gallon. The Calabasas Trolley, a citywide transit system that operates from Friday to Sunday, runs on CNG.

"The key to expanding the use of CNG vehicles is to find companies willing to build and maintain CNG fueling facilities," Gdala said. "The city would invest more into CNG vehicles if the infrastructure were in place."

Currently, the city's CNG vehicles are fueled in Canoga Park.

**The future**

Gdala said an appliance being developed for installation in drivers' garages would compress natural gas from a home's gas line to fuel a CNG vehicle. The fueling process, he said, would take several hours, but he suspects home CNG fuel costs would be considerably less than commercial CNG prices.

Experts believe gas prices will keep increasing at least until Memorial Day weekend. They are then expected to start coming back down, but perhaps only temporarily.