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LOCAL LEADERS TO PARTICIPATE IN NATIONAL WEEK WITHOUT DRIVING

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HUMBOLDT COUNTY, *Calif.*— Next week, October 2-8, 2023, is the first National Week Without Driving. About thirty percent of Americans can't drive. Many of those who can't drive are children, some are seniors, and many others have disabilities or other reasons for not driving, such as not being able to afford a car. Local data are hard to come by, but with higher disability and poverty rates than the national average, it's possible that an even greater percentage of Humboldt County residents can't drive.

The Week Without Driving is an invitation for anyone who wants to participate – but particularly for elected officials, transportation planners, and other decision-makers – to get some first-hand experience of what it is like to live without the option of driving, here in our local communities. Hundreds of organizations across the country are hosting local Week Without Driving pledges and events. The Coalition for Responsible Transportation Priorities (CRTP) is coordinating on the North Coast.

Local Leaders Pledge to Participate

As of this release, 23 local residents in Humboldt County have pledged to participate in the Week Without Driving, including 8 elected officials. The City of Eureka also issued a formal proclamation recognizing the Week Without Driving.

There is still time for anyone interested to learn more and take the pledge at <https://transportationpriorities.org/weekwithoutdriving>. Leaders who have already pledged to participate include:

Elected Officials

Natalie Arroyo, Humboldt County Fourth District Supervisor

Scott Bauer, Eureka City Councilmember

Kim Bergel, Mayor of Eureka

Renee Contreras-DeLoach, Eureka City Councilmember

G. Mario Fernandez, Eureka City Councilmember

Debra Garnes, Mayor of Rio Dell

Meredith Matthews, Arcata Vice Mayor

Alex Stillman, Arcata City Councilmember

Planners & Other Local Leaders

Caitlin Castellano, Eureka Senior Planner

Lisa Dugan, McKinleyville Municipal Advisory Committee Chair

Julie Fulkerson, Fulkerson & Associates

David Loya, Arcata Community Development Director

Stevie Luther, Humboldt County Association of Governments Associate Regional Planner

Jerome Qiriazzi, Humboldt Transit Authority Transit Planner

Topher Reynolds, Copious Glass

Oona Smith, Humboldt County Association of Governments Senior Regional Planner

Quotes from Participants:

Natalie Arroyo, Humboldt County Fourth District Supervisor: “This is a great opportunity to go about daily life in a new way, thinking more critically about how transportation systems in our community work, who they work for, and what alternatives exist. As a leader in this community, it is important to me for people to be able to thrive without relying on car ownership, to be able to use transit in their lives, and to have the opportunity make climate-friendly transportation choices on a frequent basis.”

Debra Garnes, Mayor of Rio Dell: “More than getting a little exercise, or about feeling the crisp fresh air, or even helping the environment, it’s about gaining a truer understanding of what it’s like to not have that car in the driveway. What it means to have to plan your travel to someone else’s schedule. Having to figuring out what to do with yourself when your only means of transportation gets you to your destination an hour early because otherwise, you’d get there an hour late. And, oh my goodness, you have a car but who can afford the gas. Sure, a week without driving will help the environment a little but more importantly, it will help us gain appreciation for those who voluntarily take mass transit daily and empathy for those who must. It’ll teach us to appreciate our bus drivers and taxi drivers and Uber type drivers. It’ll show us the gaps that need to be filled in our transit system to make it more viable for all of us to use. And, it’ll help us to understand why supporting mass transit is vital to our community’s wellbeing and our economic wellbeing. Join us in supporting a Week Without Driving.”

G. Mario Fernandez, Eureka Third Ward Councilmember: “As much as our city plans for improved walkability and bikeability it doesn’t necessarily mean increased accessibility. Planning not to drive for a week should not cause such anxiety! I would hope that we come away from this challenge with not only ideas to improve public transit services and accessibility, but also empathy and understanding of those without the ability to drive where they need to go.”

Colin Fiske, Executive Director of CRTP: “It’s a common misconception that, because we live in a rural region, everyone has a car and can drive. In fact, a lot of local people can’t or don’t drive, because of age, disability, income, or other reasons. When we make development and transportation decisions assuming that everyone will drive, we create difficult and often unsafe or unhealthy conditions for these community members. The Week Without Driving provides an opportunity for decision makers and leaders to get some important insights into the experiences of people who can’t drive.”

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