

On bus transportation for farmworkers

There have been several letters to the editor recently about the possibility of farmworker transportation in Santa Maria. I am an officially appointed member of the Santa Barbara County Transit Advisory Council, which discusses transportation issues and needs, and makes recommendations to SBCAG.

At our January meeting, a county representative announced the county and city of Santa Maria are in the process of applying for available state funding that is specifically earmarked for farmworker transportation. They are hoping to create a pilot program to address the needs of a segment of the population that is highly transportation dependent, but the current bus routes do not provide access to the desired locations.

Both SBCTAC and SBCAG support this effort. The process is in the beginning stages and input from interested individuals is welcome and encouraged.

I was shocked by the message and intention of a Sunday letter headlined "Assisting illegal immigrants illegal." It implied all agricultural workers are

undocumented or have forged documents.

Now I am not so naive to deny that there are individuals who have not complied with the lengthy and potentially costly immigration process. But I can only call it mean-spirited and arrogant to accuse all farmworkers of belonging in that category.

It is a well-known fact that almost everyone born in this country does not want to do the back-breaking work of growing and harvesting produce but are willing to pay only very modest prices for fruit and vegetables. As a result, farmworkers are often immigrants. However, to assume all of them or even the majority are undocumented is not factual.

Since all public transportation is supplemented by tax dollars, does this mean only citizens and documented aliens are entitled to ride the buses? Should bus drivers be required to ask all paying customers to prove they meet the criteria to board the bus? What about tourists? I hope it's obvious how ridiculous this notion is.

VOICE FROM SANTA BARBARA

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