

San Juan Journal

Keep your thumb out and the car at home | sjRideShare

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By Liza Michaelson

Recently a team from King 5 News flew up from Seattle to Friday Harbor in a helicopter to make a story about the new alternative transportation system we have here.

They videoed the price of gas at our fuel pumps. They videoed people standing at Ride Share signs on Argyle and Tucker, and interviewed some locals.

Howie Rosenfeld, member of the County Council, was filmed saying that hitch-hiking is an established "island tradition" and this program takes what is already happening and makes it safer. The King 5 coverage made us look provincial, like a separate reality from Seattle.

For some reason, just when they were filming, there was a lot of traffic going by, mostly big expensive-looking cars. The footage gave the impression that we are not exactly the poor remote cousin of the city we were a decade ago, more like the privileged remote cousin we are becoming.

Encouraging hitch-hiking in the county by putting up signs where it's safe to wait for rides, the Town of Friday Harbor and San Juan County are demonstrating faith in the fact that even though we are growing and our demographics are changing, we are still a trustworthy community. Encouraging people to share rides builds trust, and building trust makes us safer, so it's a good cycle to be in.

The guys on the news team were in a hurry. They had a deadline and their helicopter was waiting. To finish off the story, they wanted to film someone being picked up by a car while standing at a sign leaving town.

Glancing at his watch, Gary asked, "How long will this take?" I told him I have never waited at a Ride Share sign longer than six cars, and I average being picked up on the third car. That fit his timing fine, and sure enough, the third car pulled over.

More signs will be going up this season, but the success of the program will not be in the signs, it will be in how many people make use of them.

We can all help by simply leaving our cars at home and getting out on the roads with our thumbs out and smiles on, and by stopping to pick up folks when we have an extra seat.

— Liza Michaelson is a co-founder of the Ride Share program on San Juan Island.