

Study: Californians don't drive many miles

By Tony Bijzak, Sacramento Bee

Californians don't drive much, a new report suggests.

What, that's not what you've heard? You've heard California is a car-loving society where Joe Average spends more time behind the wheel each day – sipping coffee, talking on his cell, listening to CDs – than he does in his own family room at home?

Wrong, according to a national study released this week by the American Society of Civil Engineers.

The group assessed roads, bridges and levees nationally, and found America's functional backbone quite weak. Like a ruler-snapping teacher, ASCE gave the country as a whole a D-minus grade and California a C grade. It called on government to invest far more money in roads and other infrastructure.

What we found most interesting in the report, though, was this tidbit: California ranks only 40th in average miles driven annually per person.

The typical Californian drove 8,647 miles last year. Wyoming residents did the most driving, 16,948 miles per driver. (Where were they all headed? We'll never know.) Alaskans drove the least, 6,719 miles. (It's hard to roam when it's winter in Nome.)

So why do Californians drive less each year than residents of most states? Transportation planners have pointed out that most Californians live in dense, urban areas, where many jobs are close to homes and where a higher percentage of people find public transit useful, especially in the core Bay Area

and in central Los Angeles.

Those who drive to work may spend more time in congestion but don't travel as many miles as suburban or rural commuters.