

Sentinel Editorial

Transit District Deserves Study

It looks as though voters in the Santa Cruz area will have an opportunity to vote on the formation of a Santa Cruz Metropolitan Transit district at the November general election.

Considering the small number of people now riding the transit buses in the area, the idea to form a governmental district may find some tough sledding at the polls.

Most folks have their own transportation, an automobile.

However, we believe that it is in the best interest of all the citizenry to give some strong consideration to the merits of a public transit district.

It is true that most public transportation agencies are having a tough go these days. Very few are making money and some have been forced either into high tax subsidies or into failure.

On the other hand, the need for some form of public transportation should be obvious to everyone. It is, we believe, absolutely necessary that metropolitan areas develop mass rapid transit such as the BART program in the San Francisco Bay Area or face the hopelessness of total traffic congestion.

And, this problem of providing a form of public transit, is becoming just as essential in smaller communities as it is in the large cities.

Especially in an area where you have so many senior citizens as Santa Cruz does, it is important that these citizens be able to move about after they are no longer able to drive a motor vehicle. They should not be isolated into their immediate neighborhoods by the lack of available transportation.

By the same token, we feel that a transit system must be built within the means of the community and you cannot build something that the people cannot afford to use or that the taxpayers would be unwilling to support.

Under the existing circumstances it seems likely that any type of public transportation system—and for all practical purposes we are talking about buses in the Santa Cruz area—must be supported by some tax funds.

It may be possible that in some future time, the use of transit facilities would be great enough to be self-supporting, but present experience indicates that tax help would be required.

There are, however, benefits to non-users. The amount of people carried by a public transportation system eliminates to a degree the number of traffic lanes which have to be provided for private transportation and, perhaps, even more important, the number of parking spaces necessary to serve the automobiles.

Thus, the advantages of having a public transit district should be thoroughly studied by the voters in their determination of whether or not to form a metropolitan district.

As we have stated on several occasions, we favor a transit district.

We admit that such a district would require cautious planning and careful study so that it would not become a "monster" from a tax standpoint, but would provide sufficient service to meet the needs of the people.

One of the problems which constantly has confronted private transit systems such as the Santa Cruz Transit Company is that the high costs force them to reduce services which in turn loses patronage; then they have to raise the rates and lose more patronage.

A transit district would be in the position to utilize the tax subsidy to equalize some of the problems. It could be operated by a public district or actually leased out with the tax support system in case economic problems arise.

We sincerely hope that the officials involved in the proposed district and the voters will give thorough consideration to the broad idea of some sort of public transportation system for the Santa Cruz area.