

Widen Highway 1, *Highways* residents say

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By DICK LITTLE

REGISTER-PAJARONIAN CORRESPONDENT

SANTA CRUZ — Widening Highway One received the highest amount of play money from those attending three open houses on transportation issues in Santa Cruz County.

Santa Cruz Country Transportation Commission staff members said while roads did not do as well in Santa Cruz or Watsonville as they did in the Aptos area, their vote total of \$5,380 in play money was just over \$1,000 in front of the second place finisher, light rail.

Votes were cast by people given \$100 in play money in the form of \$10 bills. People were asked to spread the money among six alternatives including bikeways, rail, weekend rail, expanded bus service, and bike and pedestrian paths. Bikes were the big winner at the Santa Cruz open house, finishing with a total of \$2,290 from all three gatherings.

Supervisor Walt Symons said he was not surprised at the outcome. He said the people that travel the hill really did not have much of an opportunity to take part in the programs since two of the three open houses were held in the early evening. "If we draped a sign from a freeway overpass asking motorists to honk if they supported widening the road, you would hear 40,000 honks," he said.

The staff said more than 250 people took part in the process at the three open houses, with the two largest turn-outs at Aptos and Santa Cruz. Watsonville had fewer than 50 people. Besides setting up a method of determining the top choice for transportation dollars, the staff also mailed out comment cards with suggestions for the commissioners to consider. The tally on those items will not be available

until mid December.

Symons said he believed if the motoring public were surveyed, widening the freeway would "win overwhelmingly." He called the vote tally, "a blow to light rail," which received strong support in Santa Cruz, finishing in second place. It was the preferred method of transportation in Watsonville, while the freeway widening proposal received half the play money the rail proposal received.

Symons said the thinking in Watsonville was fairly predictable because they use Highway 101 to get into the Silicon Valley. Symons, who lives south of La Selva Beach, said he drove to San Jose for 13 years, and used "Hecker Pass to Highway 101... It's shorter."

Widening the freeway picked up most of its support in Aptos, defeating light rail three to one. Symons said he was not surprised since the Aptos open house was held on Saturday morning. "People who commute find it difficult to attend evening sessions," he said. "A lot of people who commute came to our morning session."

Transportation Commission Executive Director Linda Wilshusen, in a prepared release, said 58 percent of the dollars were given to alternative programs, including light rail, bicycle and pedestrian improvements, expanded bus service, and weekend rail service. Of the choices for transportation improvement, widening Highway One was the top choice.

Commission staff members pointed out the method of getting input from the public by having them use play money to determine how funds for transportation should be spent was not scientific, and should not be considered a legitimate survey.