

TRANSPORTATION 1990-1991

A-2—Saturday, Sept. 22, 1990 — Santa Cruz Sentinel

Bus cuts made permanent

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SANTA CRUZ — As expected, the Santa Cruz Metropolitan Transit District Board approved a 28 percent service cut, eliminated and realigned a number of bus routes and made previously temporary fare hikes permanent at its meeting Friday morning.

"I would prefer not to do this but we have no choice," said Santa Cruz City Councilman John Laird just before voting to make the current \$1 regular bus fare permanent.

"It's not easy . . . but it comes down to how much it costs to run the buses in Santa Cruz County," said board member Bart Cavallaro. "We're nothing but the bad guys here . . . (but) you can't spend more than you bring in."

That's the reality the board has been struggling with in recent years, a reality which has led to its current \$3.9 million deficit. Board members have blamed the deficit on fares that haven't kept pace with expenses, increases in

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insurance and medical costs for employees and deep cuts in state and federal funding.

The 28 percent service cut — which was lower than the 29 percent cut analysts had suggested — will likely mean the elimination of up to 60 bus drivers and 11 maintenance workers.

The plan that was adopted reduces the frequency with which some buses run as well as eliminating some week-end and evening runs. Twenty-three routes will be realigned or combined with others while nine routes will be eliminated altogether.

The plan, which was developed by outside analysts at a cost of \$100,000 to the district, does not leave any geographic areas of the county without service, but it does limit the number of buses that will flow through outlying neighborhoods like Lompico and Boulder Creek and consolidates a number of lines serving the same areas.

"It will spread the hurt in an even and fair system," said Live Oak Supervisor Jan Beautz.

Still, at a public hearing on the permanent fare hikes, members of the audience argued against both the increas-

es and the cuts.

"There's going to be a reduction but a raising of fares? It doesn't make a heap of sense," said Connie Day, a handicapped bus rider. "We're being taken for a ride."

"If the price keeps going up, the ridership will keep going down and it's just going to be a spiral," said UC Santa Cruz student Petra Serafin.

Many complained that transit riders will be paying fares higher than those in urban areas. But Laird said because the Transit District serves a smaller population and provides bus service to many rural areas the buses are not near as full as in urban areas while expenses remain high.

"Even after the cuts this will be the most service of any district serving 230,000 people in the state," Laird said.

Still, no one argued that either the cuts in service or the fare hikes were positive events.

"We have done the best with a horrible situation," said Laird.