

Brides or SW

# Bridge repair funds OK'd; Valley's Cucchiara boils

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SANTA CRUZ — Hopes for restoration of a link across the Pajaro River to Monterey County were buoyed Tuesday as the Board of Supervisors agreed to increase funding for the Thurwachter-McGowan Bridge reconstruction project.

The board took the action at the urging of Second District Supervisor Robley Levy, whose district anchors one side of the deteriorating bridge. On a 4-1 vote, with board Chairman Gary Patton dissenting, the board agreed to set aside \$100,000 — nearly 50 percent more than recommended by County Administrative Officer George Newell for 1986-87 — toward the county's share of bridge reconstruction costs. The move is expected to accelerate the project by a full year.

The span was closed in 1985 because it was deemed unsafe.

Located between Highway 1 and the ocean, the bridge has in the past been a preferred route across the river for farmers and bicyclists, who have been lobbying the county to rebuild it.

Reconstruction of the bridge is to be financed by a combination of funds from Santa Cruz and Monterey counties, and, officials in both counties hope, by an infusion of federal funds.

Originally, it was expected that it would take Santa Cruz County at least three years to accumulate the \$210,000 needed for its share of the \$2-million project.

But supervisors moved to chop a year off that timetable Tuesday when they agreed to add \$30,000 to the \$70,000 which Newell had already recommended be set aside for the bridge project in fiscal 1986-87.

If supervisors allocate another \$110,000 for the bridge project next year, Santa Cruz County will have met its share of the construction costs and the project will be able to proceed, provided Monterey County holds up its end of the bargain and federal funds are available.

The additional funds set aside by the board came from money which the CAO and public works officials had earmarked for street signs and road striping.

Objecting to the move, Patton said the board should not take funds away from such safety-related activities in order to "serve 600 cars a day and five farm families."

Questioning whether the needed federal funds would ever be available for the bridge project, Patton said the county should spend its

money for "striping and crosswalks and things that give (people) some protection before we start spending it on things that may not get built."

Levy sought unsuccessfully Tuesday to persuade the board to authorize public works to spend money this coming year for design work on the bridge project. Supervisors balked at that proposal, saying they were unwilling to actually spend any money on the project until Santa Cruz and Monterey counties reach a formal agreement on how the bridge is to be designed and built.

Tuesday's action came as the board approved the Public Works Department's \$24.4-million, 1986-87 budget. Included in the public works budget were funds for repair of virtually all of the damage caused by last February's storms. Much of the repair work will be done in the south end of Levy's district.

In addition to increasing the allocation for the Thurwachter Bridge Tuesday, supervisors voted to direct the public works staff to proceed with an estimated \$60,000 worth of design work on three storm damage-related projects in Supervisor Joe Cucchiara's San Lorenzo Valley/Scotts Valley district.

But the board did not actually appropriate any money for the work, indicating only that it was to be financed out of state funds which the county has not yet applied for and which, county officials say, it has no assurance of receiving.

Two of the projects involve replacement of culverts on Lompico and Hubbard Gulch roads with concrete slab bridges, at a combined cost of \$210,000. The third project, on Soquel-San Jose Road, involves construction of two retaining walls. That project would cost an estimated \$154,000.

The latter project was declared ineligible for federal funds. Officials of the Federal Emergency Management Administration (FEMA), which provides assistance for storm cleanup and repairs, also said the agency would not pay to replace the Lompico and Hubbard Gulch Road culverts with bridges. They did agree to help finance repair work for damage caused when storm runoff proved too much for the culverts and the water rose and ran over the roads.

Public works officials were directed by the CAO's office Monday to apply for state financing for the three projects. Currently, some \$40 million in state funds are available to finance storm-related public works project which have been declared ineligible for federal funds.

Insisting that the county was assured of receiving at least \$800,000 of those funds next year, Cucchiara spent much of Tuesday's lengthy budget session urging his fellow supervisors to authorize design work on the projects now, so that construction could begin by next spring, after the state funds had been received.

The supervisor attacked the issue on several fronts, in a relentless drive which began almost as soon as the public works budget hearing opened late Tuesday morning and climaxed in the capitulation of a weary board late in the afternoon.

Cucchiara argued repeatedly, despite public works officials' statements to the contrary, that estimates of the county's share of costs on nearly four dozen FEMA-financed projects were too high. Accordingly, he insisted, more funds could be made available for other projects, including the three in his district, than budget figures seemed to indicate.

Cucchiara also argued that since supervisors were willing to authorize work on numerous storm-damage repair projects for which FEMA funding had been promised but not received, the board should be likewise willing give a go-ahead for other projects for which state funds would almost certainly be available.

At one point late in the proceedings, the Fifth District supervisor sought to cut a deal with Levy, offering to back her request for additional bridge funds, if she would support his projects. Then he lashed out at the Aptos supervisor — who eventually did join the rest of the board in the vote for Cucchiara's request — for suggesting that there was no comparison between the two supervisors' proposals.

Levy noted that while her proposal to increase the bridge allocation was based on funds already in the budget, Cucchiara's request for design money "goes to the question of whether revenue ... assumptions in this budget are sound or ought to be modified."

"That is unconscionable and a poor response to an offer of good will," stormed Cucchiara, who said that if the board could find extra money for the Thurwachter Bridge it could certainly come up with design funds for his projects.

Cucchiara eventually persuaded the board to create a new budget category for design work, include his projects on the list and rewrite the budget to indicate that state funds would be received by the county to pay for the work.