

Caltrans offers Highway 1 options

11-6-98

Off-ramp 'connector lanes' could ease traffic crunch

By **DARREL W. COLE**
Sentinel staff writer

SANTA CRUZ — Adding "auxiliary" lanes between Highway 1's most congested off-ramps is one of several measures that could help ease bumper-to-bumper, rush-hour traffic, Caltrans officials told the Santa Cruz County Transportation

Commission Thursday.

That view differs from an earlier, \$800,000 Major Transportation Investment Study that concluded that widening the highway would not relieve congestion. Authors of the county-financed study recently acknowledged that conclusion was flawed by mathematical miscalcula-

tion, a misstep they apologized for on Thursday.

Acknowledging a growing traffic problem along the Highway 1 corridor, Richard Krumholz, chief of advance planning for the state Department of Transportation, said, "I wish I could say I have the magic bullet to solve all these problems but we just don't. We can, however, offer some options that could be done all at once or in phases. It will be up to you."

Among the ideas to improve traffic flow between Rio del Mar and the Fishhook at the Highway 1/17 in-

terchange were:

- Adding three "auxiliary" lanes, which are lanes that connect off-ramps at one interchange to on-ramps at another. They are also described as merger lanes. They could be built between Morrissey and Soquel, Soquel and 41st Avenue and Bay/Porter and Park. Some of the extra highway width would be accommodated by reducing the size of the median. The total cost would be about \$11.1 million, Caltrans officials estimated.

- Reconfiguring the confusing and congested interchange at Soquel

and Highway 1, at a cost of \$4 million.

- Installing traffic-flow meters at various on-ramps at a cost of about \$2.4 million.

The total estimated cost for the projects is about \$23.5 million. Caltrans officials said the money is available and could be spent as soon as the transportation commission gives the go-ahead, a step that would be politically sensitive considering the strong no-growth sentiment in parts of Santa Cruz County.

The earlier report concluded that the logical and most feasible traffic-

easing alternative would be a combination of new bus routes, a bike-way and weekend train service, which would cost about \$100 million and require the county to increase sales tax by a half cent.

Krumholz acknowledged the idea of widening the highway is controversial but said he believes a partial widening, through construction of auxiliary southbound lanes, and possibly northbound lanes, would help commuters.

"And that would still allow you to

Please see HIGHWAY 1 — BACK PAGE

Highway 1

Continued from Page A1

add train service or any of the alternatives presented in your study," he said.

Other local projects being studied by Caltrans include reconstructing the Highway 1/9 interchange and the Highway 17/Granite Creek interchange.

Future projects that could receive some state funding include adding northbound auxiliary lanes from Rio del Mar to the Fishhook, adding bus or car pool lanes and widening the San Lorenzo River Bridge and Ocean Street ramps.

What intrigued most commissioners — elected officials representing the county and cities within the county — was the auxiliary lanes, which many said is a fancy term for highway widening.

"When does auxiliary lane become a real lane?" asked Commissioner Katherine Beiers, a member of the Santa Cruz City Council.

Several residents who spoke at the meeting said any sort of lane addition would only encourage traffic, not provide relief.

What intrigued most commissioners was the auxiliary lanes, which many said is a fancy term for highway widening.

"Widening encourages," said Josh Hart, who supports rail service and bike lanes. "Is widening really a long-term solution for our county? I don't think it is."

The commission also heard the official apology from consultants Parsons Brinckerhoff for the computing mistake in the firm's report. The error was spotted by Santa Cruz residents Janet and Mike Singer.

"I wholeheartedly regret the error," said Jeff Damon, a consultant with Parsons Brinckerhoff. "The negative numbers should have been positive and the positive should have been negative. But our firm made the recommendation that if you widen the highway, it will fill up."

From the viewpoint of some commissioners, including county Supervisors Jan Beautz and Walt Symons,

the admission of a computing error cast a dark cloud on the entire report.

"It's disturbing to me the errors are described by you as insignificant considering the amount of money and time we spent," said Symons. "I'm just not willing to accept this after what we spent and considering it took a citizen out there to find the mistake. Actually, I'd like to have the Singers look at this again."

Damon for the first time had a chance to defend himself and the report's conclusion.

"In the report, we recommend a bus way, but you didn't like it, fine," he said. "But you have a freeway in a constrained corridor that will bring more traffic if you widen it, just like San Jose or anywhere else."