

Merchants flattened by Beach Street bicycle lane

Bicycle Path

By **RAMONA TURNER**

SENTINEL STAFF WRITER

While cyclists love the experimental two-way bicycle lane on Beach Street, businesses hate it.

The lane was installed last month to make beach traffic more cyclist-friendly.

SANTA CRUZ

The City Council will review the project in five months to see how the lane is working out.

Cyclist Bruce Sanders has already decided. "I love it. I don't get any more tickets," said Sanders, who remembers paying more than \$120 for a citation for riding the wrong way on Beach Street. "Now people who walk have their space and people on bikes or skateboards can ride out here."

The lane takes up pavement once used by 91 parking spaces — including some for disabled drivers — on the south side of the street.

It also opens up the ocean view for nearby merchants, eateries and lodges, some city officials are quick to point out.

But some businesses in the area say the view is fine and dandy, but they'd prefer to have customers.

Bonnie Thompson, 73, has run the Beach Mini Mart for 17 years and describes her shop as a ghost town.

"We're hurting. It's a nice day, people still eat out, they still shop, but not here," she said. "I don't know how I'm going to make it."

Across the street at Ideal Bar and Grill, owner Kevin Ogara has a more optimistic outlook on the bike lane.

"People are frustrated, but it's too early to tell how it's going to work out. Bicyclists are still getting used to it. I still see them on the sidewalk," he said. "If used properly, it will work."

Down the street at the Boardwalk, officials hope the city is taking notes and will find a way to improve the bike lane and the traffic mess it has caused.

"The lanes are confusing," said John Robinson, a Seaside Co. spokesman, describing the coned-off lanes at the amusement park's riverside lot. "We had good traffic flow with stacking lanes. Now, traffic backs up for miles."

City officials acknowledge the confusion, and say they are keeping an eye on the situation. But they say it will take time for people to get used to the changes.

"That's the whole point of this," said Cheryl Schmitt, the city's bike and pedestrian coordinator. "To see what does work, to figure it out before committing a lot of resources."

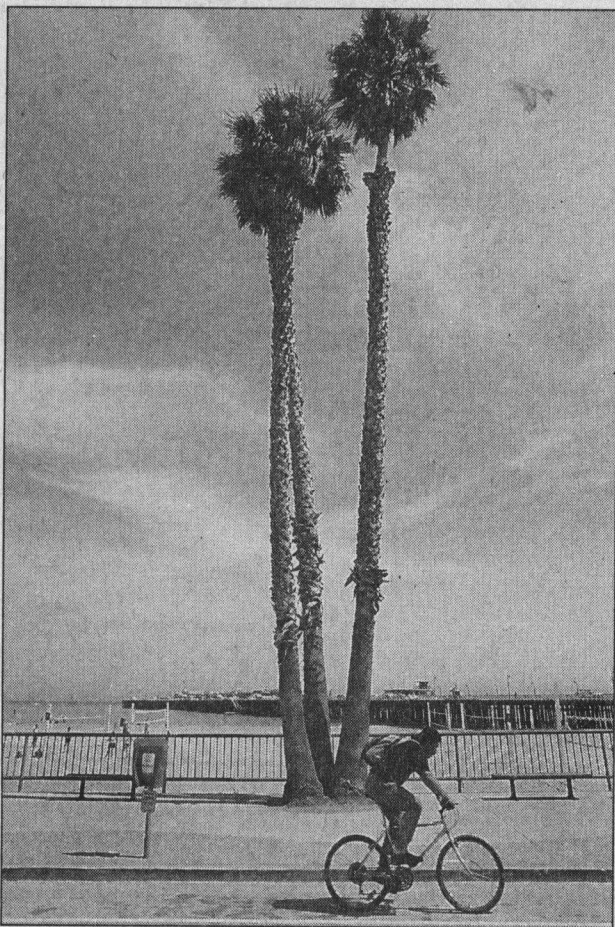
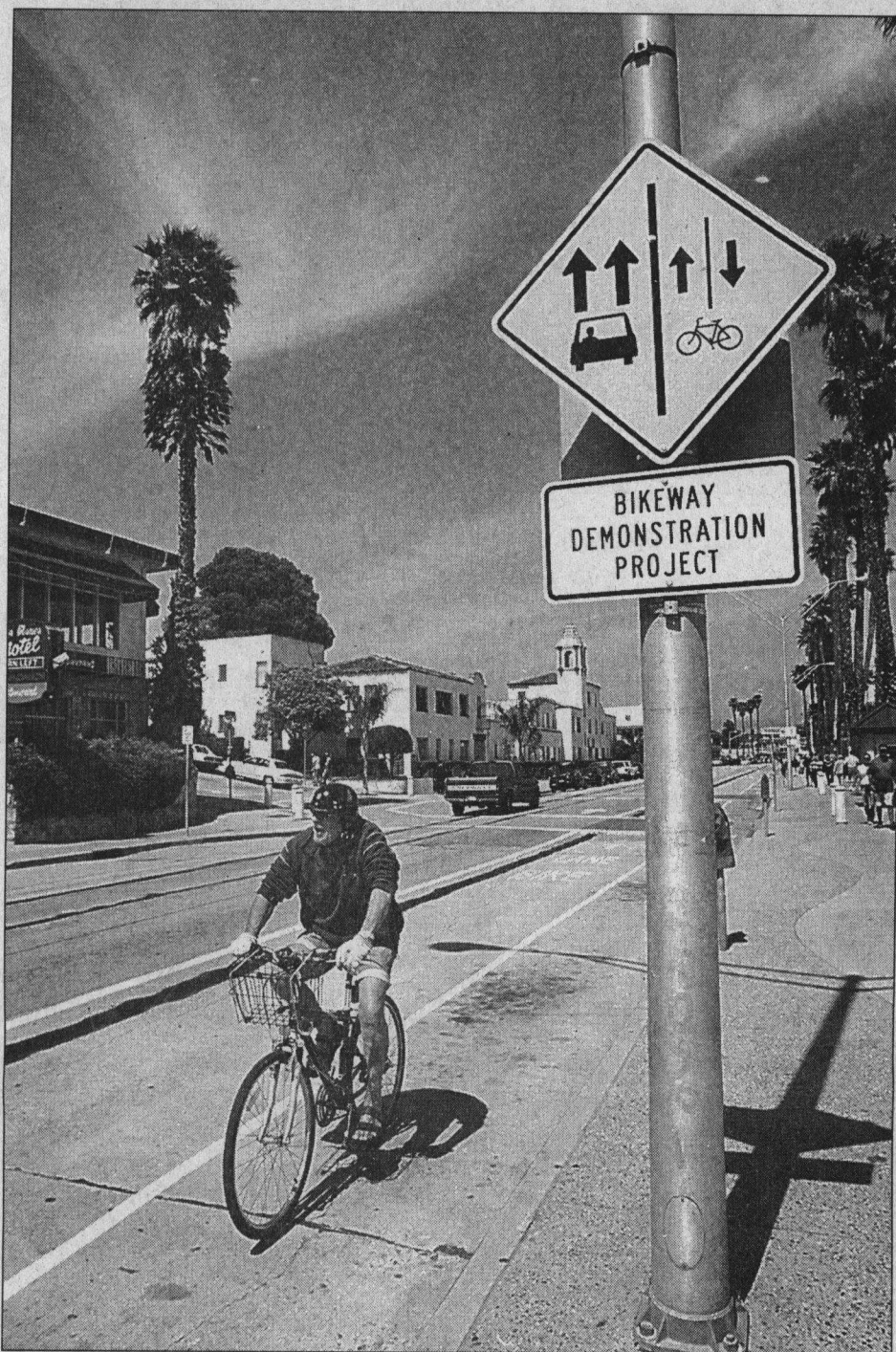
The lane, which cost about \$15,000, is a six-month experiment.

In the meantime, Schmitt has some advice for cyclists who use the Beach Street bike lane:

- Follow the rules.
- Yield for pedestrians.
- Be visible.
- Be courteous.
- Be patient.

Some modifications, including properly locating loading zones and erecting loading-zone signs, are still in the works.

Contact Ramona Turner at rturner@santa-cruz.com.



TOP: Cyclists love the new bike lanes on Beach Street, while merchants say they're losing business.

LEFT: A bicyclist pedals past a covered parking meter on Beach Street.

Dan Coyro/Sentinel photos