

Transportation plan depends on money

By BOB SMITH
STAFF WRITER

Santa Cruz County's master plan for transportation was renewed this morning, but implementing it depends, as usual, on money.

Meeting at the Capitola City Hall, members of the Santa Cruz County Transportation Commission approved the 1990 Regional Transportation Improvement Plan.

Among other things, the plan calls for Caltrans to fund several major state highway projects in Santa Cruz County, including widening Highway 129 through Watsonville from two to four lanes; rebuilding the Highway 1/17 interchange; widening Mission Street/Highway 1 through Santa Cruz to four lanes with left turn lanes; and improving the Highway 1/Bay Avenue-Porter Street interchange in Capitola. The last project also includes a southbound auxiliary lane between the 41st Avenue on-ramp and the Bay Avenue off-ramp.

But none of this will take place unless voters next month approve propositions 108 and 111, the gas tax increase and a rail bond measure.

Back in the plan is a truck lane at the summit of Highway 17. Commission staff members had dropped the plan from their recommended list of highway improvement projects. Commissioner Joanna Allshouse, who is the alternate for Pajaro Valley-area Supervisor Sherry Mehl, argued that the lane, which is not being supported by Caltrans, should be supported by the county.

Caltrans representative Mike Ellis said that any indication of support might advance the project "so that it is built in 17 years rather than 20."

Also included is the final phase of planning studies for rail or "fixed guideway" mass transit projects in Santa Cruz County — including a proposed La Selva Beach-Santa Cruz railbus service.

That's the extent of projects designed to support mass transit.

Local environmental activists argued again this month that the county should be concentrating on rail and other fixed-guideway projects, rather than build more roads or improve existing ones — in effect encouraging commuters to stay in their automobiles.

Building new roads or widening Highway 1 is not the answer, said Santa Cruz activist Celia Scott Von der Muhll.

"I would like to see the widening of Highway 1 removed from the local list," she told the commission. She quoted her husband, a UC-Santa Cruz physicist, as calculating that putting an extra lane on Highway 1 would only buy another four years before it too was jammed with cars.

Santa Cruz City Councilman and Transportation Commissioner John Laird said he's not willing, as a transportation commission or a transit district director, to make further cut-backs in the transit district's bus service to finance, at the expense of those who depend on the bus system for their daily transportation, to study something like the fixed-guideway proposals.