

City's plan to fix span riles public

Budget

Huge traffic mess foreseen

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SANTA CRUZ — You think beach traffic is bad now? Just wait.

Either next summer or the summer after, workers will tear down and rebuild the Riverside Avenue bridge, the storm-damaged conduit most tourists follow to the beach area.

That will leave hundreds of thousands of tourists — and locals who have grown used to this city's already-eccentric traffic routes — searching for the best way to the beach. And once they get to the beach, they're eventually going to be searching for the best way to leave.

The city has a plan. Well, the beginnings of a plan. The Public Works Commission's Detour Plan Task Force met Tuesday night to hear what the public thinks about its detour plan, which would essentially loop all beach traffic around the Beach Flats area and back down a two-way Beach Street, sending it out of town via Front Street.

The public had plenty to say.

"This will result in backed up traffic until 3 in the morning," said Phil Baer of the Beach Flats Neighborhood Association. "You're just going to get massive gridlock. Our lives would be intolerable and unhealthy."

Many others stood up to either air their frustrations or make suggestions. The commissioners listened patiently and took notes. They made it clear that they too have been frustrated with the situation.

"(The Department of) Fish and Game says you can't be in the river between mid-October and mid-April" when steelhead trout use it in their spawning run, said task force Chairman Albert Tollefsen. "It has to be in the summertime, there's no way around it."

"It's going to be a problem for everyone down in the beach area," he said.

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Bridge/ Plan angers residents

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The complex plan includes a variety of changes.

Traffic would come in on Ocean Street, turn right on Broadway, flow down to Front Street, run into Pacific Avenue and then turn left onto Washington Street until it reaches Beach Street at the Wharf.

It would then head down Beach Street toward the river, turn left at Third Street and begin a loop that would take it back down Riverside Avenue to Second Street to Cliff Street and back to a two-way Beach Street, where it would head back downtown and out along Front Street.

Stop signs would appear, traffic islands would be destroyed. Parking meters would be pulled out, parking spaces would be redrawn. Signal lights would be born and arrows would point every which way.

And not only will the Riverside Avenue bridge be rebuilt; but also much of San Lorenzo Boulevard, which parallels the river and crosses Riverside. So that thoroughfare will also have to be closed for much of the summer, with traffic routed to Broadway and Ocean Street.

Representatives of the Downtown Association, the Seaside Co., the Motel and Lodging Association and the Beach Area Business Association all presented different plans and comments to the task force. Most expressed grave concern about the wisdom of letting Front Street bear all the outgoing beach traffic and

predicted daily gridlock. Others criticized the idea of turning Beach Street into a two-way street and suggested other routes out of the area.

Besides route changes, a variety of other suggestions were made, including:

- Building a footbridge across the river near the construction so that guests at the motels on the non-beach side of the bridge might still have access to the beach from their rooms.
 - Rerouting shuttles past those motels to give guests a way to the beach.
 - Making Front Street one way, so it could accommodate the swarm of tourists fighting to leave town.
 - Closing Laurel Street Extension during peak hours so that emergency vehicles might have access to the beach area without getting caught in the predicted traffic jams.
 - Constructing a parking lot at the end of Chestnut Street, near the fire-ravaged Union Ice plant, where beachgoers could catch a shuttle or even follow a path to the beach.
 - Producing of a brochure that would show parking spots, shuttle and walking routes to the beach.
- "There is going to have to be a lot of education going on to advise people coming into town on how to get in and get out," Tollefsen agreed.
- Another meeting will be held next month to gather public comment on the plan.