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Traffic Patterns

# Early Apprehension, But 41st Ave. Traffic Moving

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Like ocean waves, some disputes that people have with the government churn from the time they spring out of the blue until they crash to a close. Others, like quiet swells in the deep, just sort of settle out of sight to be forgotten.

It's to that second group that the 41st Avenue traffic question seems to belong. Earlier this year, businessmen in the 41st Avenue area seemed ready for a scrap with Capitola city officials over the way traffic was being handled in their area. The Capitola Mall was in its final stages of construction, and city officials and businessmen were waiting, with a touch of apprehension, to see what kind of traffic would beat a path to the new shopping center.

That path has now been beaten, and it appears now that there is not much controversy. Outside of a couple trouble spots, traffic doesn't seem to be all that bad.

Bob Armstrong, a spokesman for the 41st Avenue Businessmen's Association, said his group has only a few minor complaints with the area's circulation plan. "The traffic flows pretty decently," he said, "and it's not bad as everybody thought it was going to be."

When the mall opened for business, its developers, Sutter Hill, paid for several improvements to 41st Avenue and Capitola Road. Forty-first grew from four to six lanes, and a cement divider was installed to separate the traffic lanes. Traffic signals were installed at Clares Street.

Capitola City Manager Max Kludt said that the traffic signals regulate traffic into waves, and prevent long lines of cars from building up in front of the mall. "Maybe I'm looking at things with rose-colored glasses, but I don't think the traffic is bad at all."

He said there is one trouble spot: the left-turn lane from Capitola Road to 41st Avenue. The problem there, he said, is that the left-turn lane is not long enough, and cars tend to back up, blocking through-traffic lanes.

But the biggest concern to traffic experts lies well north of the mall: the Highway 1 off-ramp. Spokesmen for Capitola and the state call the Highway 1 freeway interchange at 41st Avenue the biggest traffic problem in the mid-county area.

The problem, according to Kludt, is that the overpass was designed for a bucolic little 41st Avenue, not one that is a six lane route which leads to a big shopping center.

At rush hour, cars coming from

Santa Cruz which are exiting from the freeway at 41st Avenue sometimes back up onto the freeway. Traffic on 41st Avenue prevents the lead cars from working their way off the off-ramp, and traffic from nearby Gross Road adds to the confusion.

Bob Keller, a spokesman for CALTRANS, the state highway department, said that he is concerned about the traffic in that area. Someday, he said, the state, Capitola and Santa Cruz County will have to pool their money to widen the overpass to allow another traffic lane or two, and that work will cost between \$1.5 million and \$2.5 million. Such a major undertaking is several years away, however.

"We would prefer to go ahead and solve the problem by widening the overpass, but the money is just not there."

Instead, he explained, the state, the county and Capitola will have to get together to spend between \$200,000 and \$300,000 for an interim solution.

"For the time being, we will install traffic signals on 41st Avenue at the freeway, and perhaps add a traffic lane on the freeway exit."

A construction date has not been set for those additions, but the project is being discussed by the agencies involved.