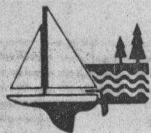


Local



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A mixed bag at highways meeting

By LAURIE SLOTHOWER

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SANTA CRUZ — A hearing on state highways in Santa Cruz County brought out a mixed bag of special-interest groups Friday morning at the County Center.

But while state officials listened politely, they could offer no assurances that any of the various speaker's projects would receive funding.

State Sen. Henry Mello, D-Watsonville, arranged the meeting to discuss traffic and safety improvements on public roadways and to get additional public comments on the five-year State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP).

Burch Bachtold, deputy director of Caltrans for the Bay Area, outlined some of the state highway improvements projects pending for Santa Cruz County, including:

- Widening of Mission Street to four lanes, which is slated to begin in April or May;

- Widening onramps and offramps of Highway 1 at Park Avenue, a \$500,000 job slated for 1988-89;

- Widening the 41st Avenue exit at Highway 1 from two to four lanes, a \$1.6 million job slated for 1985-86;

- Extending the median strip of Highway 17 around Scotts Valley, a \$1 million job slated to begin in the fall;

- Building a new bridge over the San Lorenzo River at River Street and Highway 9, a \$1 million job scheduled to begin next year;

- Rebuilding the Soquel Avenue interchange, a \$3.3 million job now under way which should be completed this fall.

As far as future highway improvements go, traffic on Highway 9 from Felton to Boulder Creek may justify a four-lane expressway, he said.

"But to widen the road to four lanes would be very disruptive to the environment. It's a beautiful, sylvan area and we have kept the concept to two lanes,"

Bachtold said.

Bachtold said that eight counties would be vying for the expected \$12 million in state and federal road improvement funds this year.

The state Transportation Commission's priority are maintenance of existing roads and safety improvements.

Construction for new highways is unlikely, "unless some new source of funding is found," Bachtold said.

At Friday's meeting, Supervisor Joe Cucchiara's aide, Cathy Calfo, put in a few words in favor of improving the Graham Hill Road/Highway 9 intersection.

Highway 9 at Graham Hill Road was scheduled for widening to four lanes and a new traffic signal was to be put in. Santa Cruz County saved \$1 million in federal road funds for the job, but in 1980 revised census figures caused the project to be bounced off the list of rural road improvement projects — it was at the top of the list — to the urban projects list, where it is

at the bottom.

Calfo called it "ironic" that the project lost its priority because of census figures which proved how many people live near the intersection, which she called "the gateway to the San Lorenzo Valley."

Capt. Steve Ellis of the California Highway Patrol discussed his office's plan to step up enforcement of traffic problems on Highway 17 in April. The local CHP office will be assigning extra units to Highway 17 during peak hours, Ellis said.

As far as accidents go, however, Highway 17 is no big deal, Ellis said — only 11.8 percent of all the accidents in the county occur on Highway 17.

"Highway 17 is a much-maligned road. It's a four-lane mountain road that's a very pleasant drive at 50 miles per hour," Ellis said. "But a lot of people have it confused with Laguna Seca. The CHP is going to be very emphatic about the 50-mile-per-hour speed limit in April," Ellis said.