

Bike path opportunity disappearing

Bicycle Paths
 By **STETT HOLBROOK**
 SENTINEL STAFF WRITER

Time may have run out for the city to use grant money to build an east-west bike path.

The Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission meets today to discuss taking back \$1.5 million it granted the city for a bike path across Arana Gulch. The commission's staff is proposing holding a hearing on the issue in October.

After reviewing the terms of the grants for the path, commission staff recommended pulling the plug on the project since the city is no longer pursuing a route across Arana Gulch to link Broadway with Brommer Street.

Jeff Almquist, transportation commission chair and county supervisor, said he favors recalling the money and making it available for other projects "that can actually be completed."

The transportation commission has funded the project since 1992. The city has spent about \$340,000 on an environmental review and engineering work for the path, but the City Council voted in July to kill it. Council members said the project would damage Arana Gulch's sensitive habitat, a 63-acre area site above the Santa Cruz Small Craft Harbor.

That decision was made without a completed environmental impact report. Councilman Keith Sugar, who led the drive to abandon the project, said the report in progress was flawed because it did not recognize the damage the project would cause and it made no sense to continue.

But going forward with the environmental report could enable the city to hold onto the money.

According to Linda Wilshusen, executive director of the commission, the city may be able to retain the money if it completes the environmental report. With a completed environmental report, the city could reject the Arana Gulch project in favor of an environmentally superior routes as long as they were studied.

Councilman Ed Porter was considering a plan to get the City Council to rescind its decision to halt the bike path study in hopes of holding onto money for other bike projects. But upon further consideration, he said going forward with the environmental report would be a waste of time.

If the commission decides to take back the money, Porter hoped the city could apply for more funding when it identifies a new project.

But according to transportation commission staff, the city may have to pay for many of the upfront costs of a new project, including an environmental report.

The transportation commission meets today at 8:30 a.m. at the Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors chamber, 701 Ocean St., fifth floor.

Contact Stett Holbrook at
sholbrook@santa-cruz.com.