

Get used to it

Highways



Dan Coyro/Sentinel

Ever had a dream where you're trying to run away and can't move? Try driving on a county highway.

Projects promise to keep highways traffic-jammed

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SANTA CRUZ — Get used to gridlock. If you thought traffic was bad Wednesday, prepare yourself for more of the same for weeks to come. Chances are a flurry of construction projects will slow your commute whether you drive Highway 17, 1 or Highway 9.

Much of the work on local highways began months ago but daytime lane closures have recently resumed after a summer siesta. Crews worked throughout the summer, but mostly the nights and evenings.

"We cut way back on daytime closures to accommodate the tourist season," said Val Houdyshell of Caltrans. "We know that traffic increases during the summer. After Labor Day we had to resume daytime closures to get this done before the weather turns (cold)."

The good news is all this will result in a smoother drive by the rainy season. In the meantime, take heart in knowing there's probably not another road less traveled.

Regulars of Highway 17 may be taking the brunt of the commuting headache. Since October, Caltrans has been resurfacing the highway in both directions from the Fishhook to Granite Creek Road. Expect this to last through October.

Grinding and paving will continue today from the Fishhook to La Madrona Drive. One southbound lane will be closed from 8:30 a.m. to 2 p.m.; one northbound lane will be closed from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.

The good news is that the stretch from Granite Creek Road to La Madrona Drive has been finished.

A median barrier also has been put in from La Madrona Drive to Highway 1, and near Mount Hermon Road.

Those on Highway 1 don't have it much easier. Southbound drivers between Ocean and Market streets can expect delays from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. today while workers pluck out pine trees stricken with pitch canker. The fungus has claimed hundreds of trees throughout the county, and in all, 170 trees will be removed along Highway 1.

Meanwhile, Caltrans will continue the major rehabilitation of Highway 1 from Emeline Avenue to Rio del Mar Boulevard. This project will not be finished until the end of the year. Work began in April and is now nearing its final stages. After months of prep work, crews are now grinding up the road.

That will continue from 9 p.m. to 6 a.m. Today through Saturday, one southbound lane from Morrissey Boulevard to Rio del Mar Boulevard will be closed, reopening each day in time for the morning commute. Work on the northbound side was done earlier this week. Expect the noise at night to last for about another week.

New asphalt should start going in by early next

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Highway horror

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month. It will probably be November before the overlay is complete. Ramps and shoulders also have been widened, and the drainage system upgraded.

Also, a section of the metal beam guard rail from Morrissey Boulevard to Soquel Avenue, and from State Park Drive to Rio del Mar Boulevard, has been replaced by a concrete barrier. Also, stretches of highway in Capitola and Watsonville are being landscaped, restoring greenery damaged by the 1990 freeze. That should be done by the end of the month.

Further south, work over the Pajaro River has been postponed.

On Highway 9 left-turn lanes are being added from Graham Hill Road to San Lorenzo Valley

High School, as well as Lazywoods Road, and Sunnycroft Road to Glen Arbor Road. Most of the work is to be done at night. But five pine trees must be removed to make room for the wider road. That means there will be one-lane traffic control today and Friday from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. between Glen Arbor Road and San Lorenzo Way. There will also be one-lane traffic control today from a two-mile stretch beginning north of Highway 236 from 9 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.

This project is expected to be done in February. Caltrans has set up a special hotline to provide daily information on expected delays, detours and closures. Call the Santa Cruz County Construction Information Hotline at (800)523-7623. Or go to the Caltrans World Wide Web page on the Internet at <http://www.dot.ca.gov.dist05/>