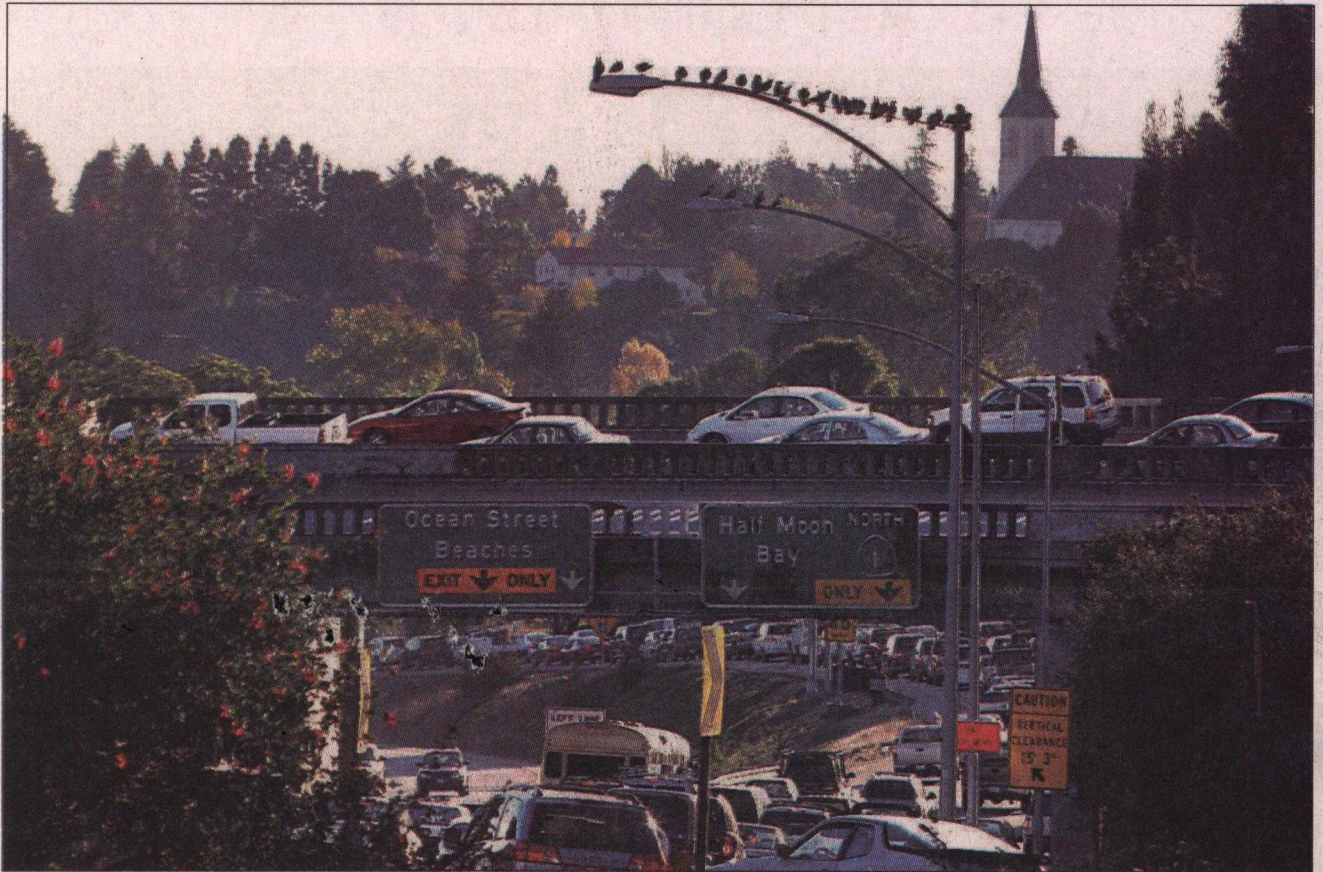


44 county bridges labeled 'obsolete' or 'deficient'



Shmuel Thaler/Sentinel

The bridge at the Fishhook connecting highways 1 and 17 is rated functionally obsolete, which means it has older design features and, while it is not unsafe for all vehicles, it cannot safely accommodate current traffic volumes and vehicle sizes and weights.

Bridges

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Officials say spans are in no danger of collapsing despite terms

By **BRIAN SEALS**
SENTINEL STAFF WRITER

✓ When talking about bridge safety in Santa Cruz County, terms like "obsolete" and "deficient" are sure to catch any motorist's concern.

Those terms were used frequently on a National Transportation Safety Agency database concerning bridges that accompanied a report issued this week on the

I-35 bridge collapse last summer in Minneapolis.

News reports this week attributed that collapse to large flat steel pieces that hold load-bearing columns in place that were too thin to support the weight they held.

That reignited discussion of bridge safety.

However, Caltrans says terms in the federal database are bureaucratic labels used to gauge repairs that may be needed. Both

Caltrans and the county say bridges in this area aren't in danger of collapse.

"I can assure motorists in Santa Cruz County our bridges are safe," said Colin Jones, district spokesman for Caltrans in San Luis Obispo. "If a bridge were in danger of collapsing, we would shut it down."

The database from the U.S. Department of Transportation's Highway Administra-

County bridges by the numbers

The following state bridges carry at least 10,000 vehicles a day and have been rated as either structurally deficient or functionally obsolete by inspectors.

D: A structurally deficient bridge is closed or restricted to light vehicles because of its deteriorated structural components. While not necessarily unsafe, these bridges must have limits for speed and weight.

O: A functionally obsolete bridge has older design features and, while it is not unsafe for all vehicles, it cannot safely accommodate current traffic volumes, and vehicle sizes and weights.

Sufficiency rating determined by calculating structural adequacy and safety, serviceability and functional obsolescence, essentiality for public use and special reductions; 100 represents an entirely sufficient bridge and a zero represents a deficient bridge.

The data of the National Bridge Inventory is compiled by the U.S. Department of Transportation's Federal Highway Administration from state reports and was provided to MSNBC.com by the National Institute for Computer-Assisted Reporting at the University of Missouri. The most recent data includes inspections through December 2006.

STATUS	RATING	ROAD	PLACE	FEATURE	MILE MARKER
O	71.1		CAPITOLA	STATE ROUTE 1	12.93
O	96.0	1	CAPITOLA	PARK AVENUE	12.09
O	96.0	1	CAPITOLA	PARK AVENUE	12.09
D	87.6		CAPITOLA	STATE ROUTE 1	13.62
O	86.8	1	SANTA CRUZ	MARKET STREET	16.37
O	81.3	1	SANTA CRUZ	MARKET STREET	16.37
O	74.4	1	SANTA CRUZ	BRANCIFORTE CREEK	16.43
O	74.4	1	SANTA CRUZ	BRANCIFORTE CREEK	16.43
O	74.4	1	SANTA CRUZ	CARBONERA CREEK	16.49
O	74.4	1	SANTA CRUZ	CARBONERA CREEK	16.49
O	89.4		SANTA CRUZ	STATE ROUTE 1	15.82
O	64.3	17	SANTA CRUZ	S17-N1 & S1-N17 CONNS	.01
D	57.0	1	SANTA CRUZ	STATE ROUTE 17	17.02
O	68.7	1	SANTA CRUZ	OCEAN STREET	17.24
O	74.9	1	SANTA CRUZ	OCEAN STREET	17.24
O	77.0	1	SANTA CRUZ	SAN LORENZO RIVER	17.41
O	77.0	1	SANTA CRUZ	SAN LORENZO RIVER	17.41
D	62.9	1	SANTA CRUZ	GRANT STREET	17.19
O	73.5		SANTA CRUZ	BRANCIFORTE CREEK	NEAR DAKOTA AVE
O	68.3		SANTA CRUZ	SAN LORENZO RIVER	50' S SAN LORENZO BLVD
O	74.6		SANTA CRUZ	SAN LORENZO RIVER	0.1 MI N/O BUENA VISTA DR
D	84.8		SCOTTS VALLEY	STATE ROUTE 17	5.45
O	76.0	17	SCOTTS VALLEY	GLEN CANYON ROAD	3.56
D	84.0		SCOTTS VALLEY	STATE ROUTE 17	3.44
O	66.0	1	SANTA CRUZ	APTOS CRK & SPRECKELS DR	10.01
O	95.0		SANTA CRUZ	STATE ROUTE 1	9.15
D	48.1	1	SANTA CRUZ	SCOTT CREEK	31.55
D	77.7	129	SANTA CRUZ	SALSIPUEDES CREEK	.56
O	62.0	9	SANTA CRUZ	HILLSIDE	2.11
O	56.8	9	SANTA CRUZ	HILLSIDE	3.67
D	90.3	9	SANTA CRUZ	FALL CREEK	7.01
O	47.4	9	SANTA CRUZ	SAN LORENZO RIVER	7.76
O	52.5	9	SANTA CRUZ	SAN LORENZO RIVER	7.87
O	60.7	9	SANTA CRUZ	MARSHALL CREEK	9.85
O	50.8	9	SANTA CRUZ	BOULDER CREEK	13.11
O	61.4	9	SANTA CRUZ	SAN LORENZO RIVER	13.61
O	81.2		SANTA CRUZ	STATE ROUTE 1	-14.86
D	48.7	1	SANTA CRUZ	WADDELL CREEK	36.3
D	87.0	17	SANTA CRUZ	LA MADRONA DRIVE	1.38
O	65.0	9	SANTA CRUZ	HILLSIDE	15.2
D	79.7		SANTA CRUZ	RODEO GULCH	0.7 MI W PORTER ST
O	55.3		SANTA CRUZ	APTOS CREEK	INTRX W/SPRECKELS DR
D	82.1		SANTA CRUZ	SCBG RY & ZAYANTE CREEK	172
O	60.3		SANTA CRUZ	BEAN CREEK	INTX GRAM HIL RD/E ZY

Bridges

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tion lists bridges in each state and by each county.

In Santa Cruz it lists a dozen bridges as "structurally deficient" and 32 as "functionally obsolete."

Despite the dire terminology, Jones said those terms were bureaucratic labels generally used for prioritizing and competing for federal dollars.

For example, a structurally deficient bridge may be one that simply needs potholes fixed, repaving or something cosmetic in nature.

"That doesn't mean they are in danger of collapsing," Jones said.

Likewise, a bridge labeled "functionally obsolete" is more aimed at a structure that, say, is carrying more traffic than was envisioned when it was built. For example, it may mean there is a two-lane bridge that needs to be widened to a four-lane bridge to accommodate traffic flow or should have a wider shoulder by modern standards.

"Those terms do sound ominous," Jones said. "You list them [bridges] in categories so you can get federal money to make improvements."

Bridges get safety inspections every two years in California, he said.

In Santa Cruz County, bridges were retrofitted at the turn of this decade to withstand earthquakes.

Rakesh Goel, a civil engineer and professor at Cal Poly San Luis Obispo, agreed the terminology used can be disturbing.

He said in his view most of the state's bridges are safe.

"I would say most of them are fine," Goel said.

He pointed to an article in the winter 2008 issue of ASPIRE, a trade magazine on the concrete bridge industry. The article can be found at www.aspirebridge.org/pdfs/magazine/issue_05/safety_service_win08.pdf

In the early 1970s, Congress passed a law mandating bridge inspections and inventories to be used to identify bridges eligible for replacement or rehabilitation, according to the article.



Dan Coyro/Sentinel

The Spreckels Drive Bridge over Aptos Creek — built in 1937 — is one of many local bridges named in the report. It is rated a 55.3.

"If unsafe conditions are identified during a physical inspection, the structure will be closed," the article says.

The data on bridges and the terminology are used to dole out federal dollars.

Bridges must be labeled as "structurally deficient" or "functionally obsolete" to receive funding. A number rating system was assigned to various parts of the structure, with lower rated num-

bers qualifying for federal money.

"Unfortunately when the term 'structurally deficient' was implemented, little thought was given to how the general public would interpret them," the article says. "Bridge professionals are now considering how these terms are perceived by the public and may change them."

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