

# Fight over historic bridge seen

## Bridges Dilemma:

Santa Cruz City Council to decide as bicyclists, pedestrians and motorists battle over access to West Cliff drive.

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Bicyclists and pedestrians who have had Santa Cruz's historic West Cliff Drive Bridge to themselves these past few years will have to fend off frustrated motorists to keep it that way.

After four years of study, the City Council on Tuesday will consider the fate of the 77-year-old wooden Howe Truss, believed to be the last of its kind in the state.

Caltrans closed the 62-foot span near Washington and Beach

streets in June 1992 after discovering severe moisture and termite damage. It was reopened to bicycles and pedestrians a year later.

Both the Public Works Commission and a committee appointed by the council in 1991 to study the bridge repair have recommended shoring it up for bicycles and one-way traffic, rather than building a new one for cars in both directions. The idea is to preserve the historic structure while accommodating all those who want to use it.

"It's really a balance of the issues — historic preservation, safety, bicycle and pedestrian access and traffic flow in the area," said Diane Louie, chairwoman of the West Cliff Drive Bridge Steering Committee. "It certainly looks like a reasonable compromise."

But many bicyclists and motorists disapprove. Bicyclists want to keep cars off the bridge, saying it's too narrow to share.

"Before the closure, it was too dangerous from a bicyclist's per-

spective and was useless for pedestrians," said Don Fong, a local computer consultant who has fought for bicycle access to the bridge.

"A lot of bicyclists were afraid to use it even though it was a good shortcut," said Fong, who is organizing a bicycle ride-in from the bridge to City Hall at 6 p.m. Tuesday.

The council, anticipating a large turnout, is holding the hear-

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## Battle focuses on old bridge

Bicyclists seeking to keep autos away

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ing in the civic auditorium.

Drivers, meanwhile, insist that they be allowed back on the bridge in both directions, saying the closure has caused intolerable traffic.

"The backup down on Washington Street on weekends is terrible," said Izzy De Rego, who lives off of West Cliff Drive. "If an emergency vehicle had to come up here, they would have a hard time. The bridge would give them another route. It has always been two-way for cars, and I see no reason why it should change."

The city's public works department said in a staff report that a one-way bridge would not reduce traffic congestion for Westside residents, and is potentially unsafe. The report recommends replacing the bridge with a new two-way concrete structure, with one option incorporating the some of the bridge's timber to resemble the original.

Restoring the existing bridge would cost \$845,000, most of which would be paid for by Federal Bridge Rehabilitation and Replacement funds, according to city staff reports. The city's share would be 10 percent, or \$84,500 of the cost. A new two-way bridge would cost \$1.8 million, with the city paying \$180,000.

Southern Pacific Railway built the bridge in 1918 over its train tracks using a design patented by William Howe in 1840.

The bridge was included in the 1989 Santa Cruz Historic Building Survey and in "Historic Highway Bridges of California," published by Caltrans the following year, and is a candidate for the National Register of Historic Places.

Concerns about the bridge's deteriorating condition in the 1980s led Caltrans to seek funds to replace it.