

Aerial-tramway plan gets a lift

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SANTA CRUZ — The idea for an innovative gondola-like aerial tramway for downtown Santa Cruz got a lift Friday when the Santa Cruz Metropolitan Transit District directors approved a draft study of the proposal and passed it on to other agencies for review.

But directors were quick to point out that their preliminary acceptance in no way means the proposed \$26-million, 3½-mile-long tramway will be built.

Transit Board Chairman Mike Rotkin said he's "excited" about the aerial system, which would run from the beach through downtown and to UC Santa Cruz, using overhead cables and sixto- 12-passenger cabins similar to the gondolas used at some ski resorts.

Transit District General Manager Scott Galloway said the aerial sys-

tem is "looking rosy" — least in terms of technological feasibility. He said it could possibly become a reality in the next decade.

At the same time, both Rotkin and director John Laird — who is chairman of the district's Policy and Finance Committee — said there are "serious questions" remaining. Neither specified what those were, but the study cited such concerns as noise, visual impacts and how wind might affect the system.

Rotkin said the board's ultimate decision on the system would "probably be one of the major decisions the district will make in the next five years."

The board's action passes the draft study on to numerous governmental agencies for review, including both the Santa Cruz County and California Transportation Commissions and the Urban Mass

Transportation Administration. Additionally, the study will be the subject of a joint meeting between the Transit District and the Santa Cruz River Restoration Committee to review the system's proposed need for two crossings of the San Lorenzo River.

The draft study cites the aerial tramway as the best alternative of the possibilities being studied. Those include other fixed guideway systems, such as monorail, light rail and a combination monorail-aerial tramway.

A two-month public review is expected to begin in November before a final study returns to the Transit Board in January, said Galloway.

He noted that the "driverless" aerial system is "glamorous." If it becomes reality, it would be the first transit system of its kind in the western United States and one of only a handful in the country.