

REPORTS & COMMENTS

Beach Development

Traffic Stuck in 10-Year Jam

WHILE RESIDENTS of the beach area groan that traffic is worse in their neighborhood this year than ever before, the city insists that at least it is moving forward — slowly, but moving.

On Tuesday, May 12, the city council will discuss a list of recommendations for improving traffic flow near the beach developed by a private firm called DKS Associates. That study, initiated a year ago, focused on "ways to accommodate

traffic in the beach area in a manner sensitive to (residents), but also provides for expanded tourism activities."

The blueprint for traffic improvement development was divided into three parts: short-term (less than two years); interim (two to six years); and long-term (more than six years). City traffic engineer Jim Helmer said that the time estimates were "purely estimates and nothing more," meaning it will doubtlessly take longer than the

figures indicate.

Short-term recommendations include:

— Converting Riverside Avenue, Beach Street and Third Street into a one-way, counterclockwise loop surrounding the Beach Flats neighborhood (although not part of the report, city traffic engineers have also recommended a series of traffic barriers to keep tourist traffic from cutting through the middle of the residential neighborhood).

— Installing a traffic light at the intersection of Riverside Avenue and Beach Street.

Interim improvements include:

— Rebuilding the Riverside Avenue Bridge to a four-lane bridge (during construction, all traffic leading to the beach would be directed across the Broadway bridge through the Front Street corridor).

— Making a one-way route out of lower Ocean, Barson Street and San Lorenzo Boulevard to bring tourists into the area via Barson and take them back out via San Lorenzo;

— Installing a traffic signal at the mouth of the wharf.

Long-term improvements include:

— Building a new Ocean Street Bridge to carry tourists out of the beach area.

— Reconstructing the Laurel Street Extension to make sort of a back-door exit leading to south Pacific Avenue.

To relieve the tight parking conditions in the beach, DKS Associates came up with the following recommendations:

— Increase parking fees from 50 to 75 cents per hour, decrease meter time limits from six hours to two hours, and increase parking fines.

— Initiate a residential parking program in Beach Hill similar to those in Capitola.

— Build a large (up to 400 spaces, multilevel) parking structure in the south Pacific Avenue/Front Street area (the obvious location being across Front Street from the Toyota dealership on land owned by Seaside Co. president Charles Canfield).

Until the city council makes a commitment to the proposal, all the recommendations will remain pie-in-the-sky, particularly the long-term ones, which have no funding source at this point.

Although public and private planners and policymakers generally seemed to like the overall plan, all couched their optimism by stressing that any and all improvements will be a long time in coming.

"I don't think you're going to see a lot happen this summer," said traffic engineer Helmer, who estimated that the most that will happen in the next two years is the one-way loop around Beach Flats, a few traffic barriers and a couple of traffic lights.

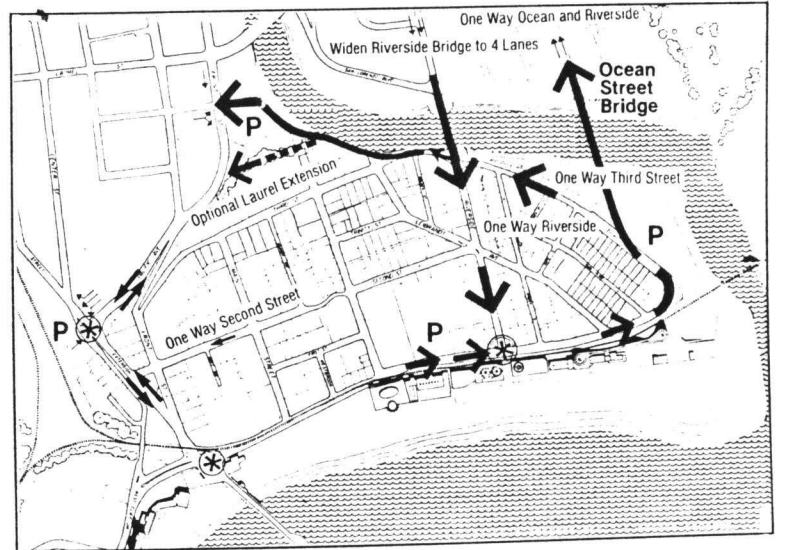
Beach Flats resident Phil Bare questions the loop, which he said

(continued on page 6)



Beach Street today: Roadways in the beach area look more like parking lots than thoroughfares on sunny weekends recently.

REPORTS & COMMENTS



Beach

(continued from page 4)

would be a pain for residents of the Flats while not helping merchants at the west end of Beach Street.

Beach Hill resident Carmen Sherwood, who has had more than her share of run-ins with rude tourists blocking her driveway, is not too impressed by the recommendations: "There's gridlock all weekend now — it's pointless to say, 'Well, we'll widen some roads and put in a few parking spaces in a couple of years.'"

Charles Canfield, president of the Seaside Co. (the owners of the

Boardwalk) said he, too, is distressed by the traffic conditions that many people blame his business for.

Although Canfield supports the city's efforts to do something about the problem, he said people choosing to live near a beach in a coastal resort town shouldn't act so surprised that traffic is bad in their neighborhood:

"If you buy a house on a golf course, you can expect a few golf balls to come flying through your windows." •

—Sam Mitchell

Our series on Beach Area development continues next week with a look at planned housing improvements.