

New intersection hardly a breeze for commuters



DAN COYRO/SENTINEL

Santa Cruz roundabout does little to ease congestion, many say

By SHANNA MCCORD

smccord@santacruzsentinel.com

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SANTA CRUZ — The recently reconfigured beach area intersection that filters traffic to Main Beach and the Municipal Wharf was hardly the surefire solution to making the drive a breeze during the first busy weekend of the summer season.

Many motorists and nearby business owners complained that the roundabout at Center Street and Pacific Avenue was often extremely congested with cars at a standstill during Memorial Day weekend — even more jammed than the old four-way stop sign intersection that had been there.

They say the intersection was particularly bad on Sunday with motorists lined up, sometimes all the way to Laurel Street, trying to make their way to the beach.

“Cars were stopped dead in front of the store,” said Daniel Strawn, owner of Pacific Avenue Cycles. “It was pretty packed down here. No matter how fast the roundabout goes, it still backs up here.”

Santa Cruz Public Works officials completed the \$1 million roundabout in front of Depot Park earlier this year, replacing the stop signs. Construction for a second roundabout is planned for later this year at Beach Street in front of the wharf.

Public Works Director Mark Dettle said the roundabout “worked well,” but conceded that the intersection did become overwhelmed with heavy traffic during the weekend afternoons.

Dettle said he drove through the intersection



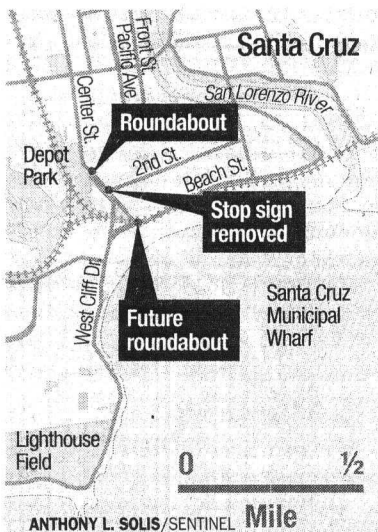
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TOP: The new beach area roundabout at Pacific Avenue and Center Street is problematic for motorists, cyclists and pedestrians coming together on a busy weekend.

ABOVE: Bike rental owner Keith Hodgson hates the new roundabout — especially after the city took away six parking spots near his Electric Sierra Cycles next to the intersection.

‘No matter how fast the roundabout goes, it still backs up here.’

DANIEL STRAWN, Pacific Avenue Cycles



ANTHONY L. SOLIS/SENTINEL

TRAFFIC

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several times during the weekend to drop off and pick up his daughter at the wharf. On Sunday afternoon, he said it took almost 10 minutes to drive from the Police Department on Center Street to the wharf, about half a mile.

"It worked fine," Dettle said. "The whole beach area was overwhelmed. There was just way too much traffic."

Santa Cruz police officers took video of the weekend traffic jams to share with Public Works officials so they can come up with plans to improve traffic flow for summer tourists.

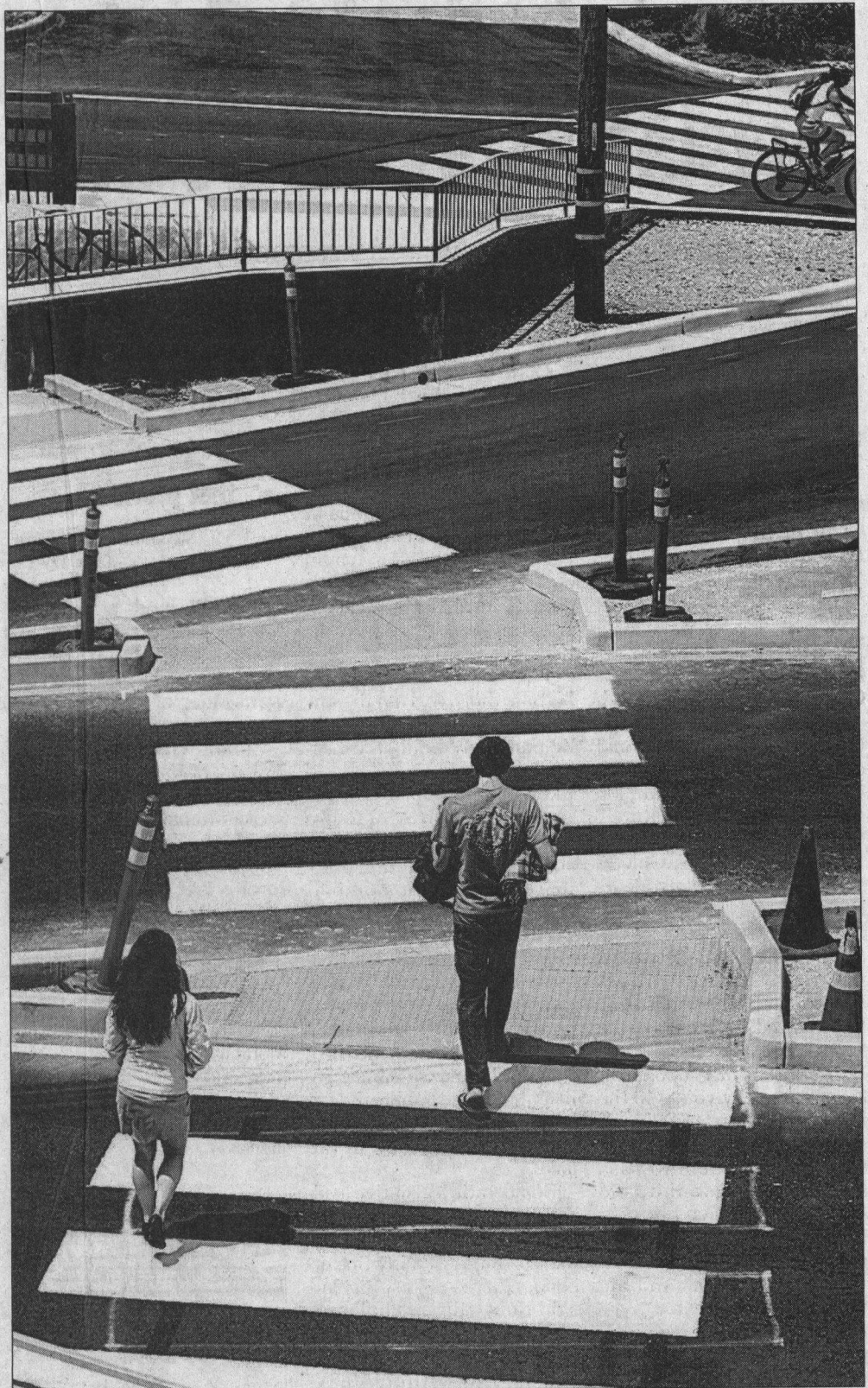
Deputy Chief Steve Clark said the roundabout was packed with cars unable to move through the circular drive quickly primarily because traffic was tied up at Beach Street.

The elimination of the stop sign on Pacific Avenue in front of the Las Palmas Taco Bar made it difficult for drivers to turn off Second Street, which added to the beach area's overall traffic headaches during the weekend, Clark said.

"Sunday was just one of those days. It's not the roundabout's fault," he said. "We just get more cars than our roads can handle. It's a blessing and a curse."

Keith Hodgson, who has owned Electric Sierra Cycles for 12 years on the corner of Pacific Avenue and Center Street, believes the new configuration is more dangerous than before because cars don't have to stop before turning right onto Pacific. He said cars now fly by at 20 mph, which he says poses a threat for pedestrians and cyclists.

"This intersection is going to be a disaster this summer," Hodgson said. "The city basically turned this into a freeway. This is wrong."



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The city's first roundabout cost \$1 million. Another is planned just down the street in front of the wharf.