

Countywide taxes proposed to pay for Live Oak street improvements

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County residents should open their pocketbooks to pay for a \$21.1 million sidewalk-and-street-improvement plan in Live Oak neighborhoods, Live Oak resident Rob Bremner told the Santa Cruz County Transportation Commission yesterday at a public hearing on the county's Live Oak traffic study.

"I read in the newspaper that it was referred to as 'overkill,' and maybe that's what we need," Bremner said of a proposed countywide ½-cent sales tax.

Transportation director Linda Wilshusen was quoted in Monday's Register-Pajaronian as saying such a tax might be 'overkill' because it would raise more money than Live Oak needs.

Possible existing funding sources listed in the study include money from the federal gas tax; the Live Oak Traffic Improvement Area Fund, which consists of developers' fees collected for street improvements; a similar fund set up for sidewalk improvements, and county funds used to install and maintain traffic signals throughout the county.

Besides the proposed ½-cent sales tax increase, new revenue sources include setting up a County Service Area, charging Live Oak property owners approximately \$125 each for four years in a special tax assessment. The county is also in the process of declaring

itself a redevelopment agency, as a way of retaining property taxes in Live Oak that would normally go to the state.

The most popular funding method among Live Oak residents is a countywide service area that would assess all county property owners for the improvements, rather than only Live Oak owners.

In response to a nine-page list of concerns submitted by Bremner, who is president of the Live Oak Community Association, the Commission continued the hearing until next month's meeting, so county transportation planners can answer those concerns.

While Bremner commended county planners for recommending that many of Live Oak's streets be widened to handle an increasingly high volume of traffic, he asked for more extensive widening than the study suggested.

For example, the study calls for widening Capitola Road to four lanes from Seventh Avenue to the Capitola city limits, but Bremner said a continuous left-turn lane is needed from Seventh Avenue to 30th Avenue to compensate for heavy development that's taken place in that area.

He also called for five lanes, rather than four, on Seventh Avenue from East Cliff Drive to Capitola Road. Seventh Avenue from Soquel Avenue to Capitola Road should also be considered for widening, Bremner said, because of a proposed commercial development off Bostwick

Lane, near Green Acres School.

He also called for three lanes on East Cliff Drive from 13th to 17th avenues, and on 17th Avenue from Capitola Road to Portola.

Bremner called 17th Avenue and Portola Drive "the most dangerous intersection in Live Oak" and asked that stop signs, concrete islands and striping be installed as a temporary solution, rather than traffic signal lights as the county suggests.

Seventh Avenue and Eaton Street should be a high priority for traffic lights, he said.

He also suggested that a new bus route planned through Live Oak on 17th Avenue be implemented as soon as possible, to serve senior citizens in that area who are not now served by the transit district.

Two needs not mentioned in the study also need to be addressed, Bremner said — trucks and side streets. Truck routes should be established on major streets through Live Oak, he said.

"Trucks would be allowed off designated routes only for pickups or deliveries," he said.

Side streets should be included in the study, Bremner told the Commission, because many people use them to avoid traffic on the more major streets. Streets like Chanticleer and 30th avenues and Mattison Lane will experience "larger amounts of traffic as streets become clogged," he said.

Bremner agreed with the county's recommendation for

bicycle lanes on major streets such as Capitola Road, Soquel and 17th avenues and Brommer Street.

The Live Oak Community Association had originally recommended getting bicyclists off the major streets and onto side streets, Bremner said, but decided the narrow width of side streets would present more danger than heavy traffic.

Bremner also addressed stop signs, streetlights, sidewalks and crosswalks.

He advocated a countywide plan to pay for the improvements because development was shoved into Live Oak in recent years to preserve other areas of the county, he said.

Live Oak's Traffic Improvement Area Fund, which consists of developers' fees, should not be expected to shoulder the burden, Bremner said, because those fees were just recently raised from about \$82 to \$1,735; they should have been higher all along to bear the cost of street improvements.

"I don't think that we should have to pay for improvements that were given away," he said.

A redevelopment agency being set up by the county to help fund improvements in the area should be narrowed to include only Live Oak, Bremner said, rather than stretching to Cabrillo College.

The possibility of a countywide sales tax "seems to have some merit," he said.