



Tarmo Hannula/Register-Pajaronian

The ebb and flow of traffic on Highway 1, shown Wednesday as it passes through Capitola, has local residents, commuters and officials grappling over the idea of expanding the heavily traveled freeway to three lanes in each direction from Highway 17 to State Park Drive or Larkin Valley Road.

Highway 1 widening is top priority for county

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With the end of the major tourism season nearing, anyone who's traveled through Aptos and Capitola this summer is probably perturbed by the almost daily gridlock on the Highway 1 stretch through the area.

That issue — the increasing amount of traffic coming and going through Santa Cruz County — is making its way through various Pajaro Valley organizations and clubs this week. The Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commissioners are circulating a survey to see if south county leaders are in favor of widening Highway 1 through Santa Cruz.

A letter and survey being circulated by Santa Cruz County supervisors Tony Campos (District 4) and Ellen Pirie (District 2) is asking business and social organizations to rate their support for the widening project and asking what is the best way to go about funding the project.

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The letter states that the SCCRTC and county board of supervisors has placed the widening of Highway 1 as their top priority.

"We have always known that this is a very high priority for south county residents," said Ednilson Quintanilla, a county analyst for Campos. "We are now asking individuals whether they would support a tax measure and how the measure should be structured."

The survey is an attempt to gain information on other projects that may be included in the expenditure plan, to identify south county residents' perspectives on the importance of Highway 1 renovations and to find out whether an individual or group would advocate a ballot measure.

The surveys have been presented to organizations such as the Pajaro Valley Chamber of Com-

merce, the Watsonville Rotary Club and the Santa Cruz County Latino Chamber of Commerce, among several other groups.

"We have supported the widening of Highway 1 for some time, but we are waiting to see how the final tax measures are written to see if we are going to support the measure," said David Bolick, president and CEO of the PV Chamber of Commerce. "One of the things that most people don't realize is that a lot of commerce is moved on trucks, and if they can't get to this area easily, it costs local businesses more money to move their goods."

The current four-lane highway was designed in 1950. Since then, the population of Santa Cruz County has more than quadrupled. The system originally was designed to handle approximately 60,000 vehicles a day. Today, over 110,000 vehicles of all shapes and sizes use the highway for transportation.

The SCCRTC is looking at the possibility of a voter-passed, countywide sales tax increase of a half

cent over the next 30 years to pay for the estimated \$300 million project.

The current proposal would add a High Occupancy Vehicle lane in each direction from Morrissey Boulevard to State Park Drive, and one HOV lane southbound from State Park Drive to Larkin Valley Road.

"We have been assisting the SCCRTC for several years and are in full support of the widening of Highway 1," said Luis De La Cruz, president of the Santa Cruz County Latino Chamber of Commerce. "However, before we take this to a vote, we first need to get the politicians to decide on how the money already allocated to the project will be spent, because the amount of money already spent is grave."

The SCCRTC is tentatively planning to have a tax measure on the November 2004 ballot. It will begin the Highway 17/1 interchange renovation in the fall, which already has garnered the necessary funds slated by the state government.