

# Watsonville urges plan for 4-lane Highway 1

## Council supports buying land for eventual widening

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WATSONVILLE — Vice Mayor Richard De La Paz doesn't want his children to have to deal with unfinished Highway 1 widening business in 2020 — when traffic congestion is projected to be the same as today, despite the addition of a car-pool lane on the 6.5-mile stretch between Aptos and Santa Cruz.

That is why De La Paz says he supports buying enough land for a fourth lane during right-of-way acquisition and bridge and overpass widening this time around. That way, if the highway is widened beyond the proposed three lanes, future generations won't have to go through that process again.

"Let's take what we need and set some aside for later," said De La Paz, a member transportation commission. "In 20 years, if we need it, wouldn't it be nice to just be able to pay for the construction of the road and not much more? Waiting until the additional car-pool lane is built and then saying, 'We've got to do it again' is a waste of time and money," De La Paz said.

A motion encouraging the Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission to take future widening into account now in the widening project passed the City Council 6-1 Tuesday night.

Linda Wilshusen, commission executive director, said money might be an issue when discussing the addition of a fourth lane. Earlier this month, transportation commissioners decided to pursue a local sales tax measure

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## Highway 1

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by November 2004 to fund the Highway 1 widening project. A half-cent sales tax for 10 to 20 years would generate about \$200 million to \$400 million, preliminary projections show. The widening project will cost an estimated \$300 million, with completion slated for about 2013.

Wilshusen told the council on Tuesday that money "would just barely pay for" the currently proposed plan to widen the highway with a single car-pool lane in each direction.

"I think one thing we'll have to wrestle with if this (fourth lane) option is an alternative in the environmental document is how we would pay for it," Wilshusen

said. There would be additional costs associated with building larger bridge/overpass structures and acquiring additional rights-of-way, she added.

Still, De La Paz believes additional spending now would save a lot of money in the long run.

"By 2020, we will have spent close to \$300 million to still take an hour to get to Santa Cruz," De La Paz said. "It would cost us a little more money now, but imagine if we had to do this again. That's something I don't want my kids to have to deal with."

Councilwoman Judy Doering-Nielsen agreed, saying it "just makes sense ... (to) plan for the future." County Supervisor Tony Campos, a member of the transportation commission, also supports the idea.

Councilman Rafael Lopez questioned whether the majority of commissioners, several of whom also favor pursuing alternative modes of transportation such as

bike trails and rail lines, would back the idea. Also, he pointed out that Monterey County's planned rail extension would eventually benefit Watsonville.

"I think in the long term, rail will be an option, because we can't continue to widen the highway so much that we have no place to put it," Lopez said. Lopez was the lone dissenter when the council put the issue to a vote.

For daily commutes between Watsonville and Santa Cruz, bike travel is an "unrealistic" option, particularly for families with small children, De La Paz said.

The possibility of a future fourth lane will likely be an option presented to the commission as an alternative in the environmental document, officials say. Environmental review is slated for completion by about fall 2007.

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