

Pacific traffic reversal explored

Pacific Avenue
Proposal shopped to public to change direction between Church, Cathcart

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SANTA CRUZ » The Santa Cruz Downtown Commission is re-opening the conversation on changing the direction of traffic on the city's downtown Pacific Avenue; more than two years after a similar earlier plan failed to gain

traction.

This time around, the plan would sweep incoming traffic south down the city's main street, all the way to the beach, without being diverted onto and around through feeder streets. Specifically, a one-way segment of Pacific between Church and Cathcart streets would convert from northbound to southbound.

+ **Online:** To see a map of the proposed change to Pacific Avenue, visit SANTACRUZSENTINEL.COM and click on this story.

An earlier version of the plan, backed by merchants advocacy group Downtown Association, recommended making a large portion of the central corridor street two-way. The recommendation followed a 2010 consultant's study suggesting that converting Pacific to a two-way street could improve commercial conditions

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If the plan under exploration were to become reality, Pacific Avenue traffic would flow the opposite direction than it does now from Church Street to Cathcart Street.

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for local businesses by as much 30 percent. The proposal stalled in November 2011 after the Santa Cruz Fire Department raised alarms that they would not be able to make the narrow turns on and off Pacific Avenue in their large fire apparatus vehicles.

A commission ad-hoc committee has been shopping the latest version of the plan around to area business and merchant organizations and speaking with other city and community leaders, said Downtown Commissioner Jesse Nickell at a meeting Tuesday morning. A parallel plan to distribute area navigational signs pointing motorists toward Pacific Avenue from highway off ramps would be integral, commission members said.

"Right now this is something that would be good for the tourists, good for locals, and giving people a sense of direction for the downtown," Nickell said. "I think everybody's fear is if it's not broken, why fix it. But I ask the question, why can't people go down our main street and get oriented without getting thrown off."

Santa Cruz Fire Department acting Chief Mark Ramos said his department supports the latest plan, because it maintains an aspect of one-way traffic on Pacific.



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The one-way direction of much of Pacific Avenue could be reversed to help with traffic flow and simplify emergency response under a plan the Santa Cruz Downtown Commission is exploring.

"This would work for us," Ramos said. "We will have to change the direction of Walnut and Lincoln, our main response route for us to get to Soquel (Avenue.) This will have us going with the flow of traffic."

After the meeting, Nickell added that the plan was to keep it simple. The project cost, at an estimated \$40,000, would be minimal, he said.

The idea comes with a potential expiration after two years, and should involve looking at how the city's trolley route would be impacted, Commissioner Casey Coonerty Protti said. Nickell said he is aiming to see the effort in place by Christmas time.

Pacific Avenue's segmented traffic flow was implemented after the 1989 Loma Prieta earth-

quake devastated downtown. Shortly afterward, a downtown recovery master plan was created, environmental analysis was undertaken and a cross section of the community met to determine how the corridor should look going forward.

Assistant Director of Public Works Chris Schneider said he expects the ad-hoc committee will be working with his department to go over the logistics of the proposal, including looking at impacts to the nearby two-story parking garage.

"The idea was we're really interested in improving the pedestrian access. The sidewalks got a lot wider," Schneider said. "I think it's been working well, but I think everyone's interested in seeing if there could improvement."