

State rejects bike path plan

Proponents focus
on federal funding,
lobbying to ease
funding restrictions

Bicycle Paths

By **HEATHER BOERNER**

Sentinel staff writer

SANTA CRUZ — In a decision Santa Cruz City Councilman Tim Fitzmaurice called "catastrophic," the state Transportation Commission has said plans for a 20-mile bike and pedestrian path are ineligible for \$11 million in state money.

But members of the Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission, which has championed the plan for more than two years, haven't given up on the bike path itself.

Instead, in the wake of the state panel's decision that state tax revenue from Proposition 116 cannot pay for the project, the commission is turning its attention to federal funding and lob-

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turning its attention to federal funding and lobbying the state Legislature to ease restrictions on how the money can be spent.

"I don't know where they get off," Fitzmaurice said Thursday. "I hope we respond with an aggressive, assertive and annoyed letter. The amount of disrespect (state Transportation Commission Executive Director Robert Remen) showed us in the letter is shocking. He picked apart our proposal in such a juvenile way."

The proposed bike path, from Lighthouse Point in Santa Cruz to Lovers Point in

Pacific Grove, is part of the county's overall traffic-mitigation plan that includes widening Highway 1 and improving bus service.

The bicycle-lane plan would have the transportation commission purchase the land surrounding the tracks that cut through the county while allowing Southern Pacific Railroad to continue using the line to haul freight. But the commission won't be receiving the \$11 million it was counting on to pay for the project.

Both Assemblyman Fred Keeley, D-Boulder Creek, and Remen told the local commissioners in letters presented at Thursday's commission meeting that they'll have to look elsewhere. The tax revenue they had planned to use must be used to improve passenger rail service, not to buy land along the rail for a bike path, Remen said in a letter dated May 15.

"It would seem that the need to expend \$11 million for the preservation of this corridor for future rail transit is at best premature, if not unwarranted," Remen wrote. "I would submit that if the only transportation utility gained through the purchase of this corridor were for pedestrian and bicycle facilities, however worthwhile, the prescribed purposes of Proposition 116 for passenger rail service would not be met."

County transportation analyst Debbie Hale told the commission Thursday, however, that it could probably secure cash from another source, but that it would likely take more time. She did not say how long.

In authorizing its staff to pursue other funding, commissioners also called for the state to contribute more money to their plan to widen Highway 1 and add toll and high-occupancy vehicle lanes. Fitzmaurice, county Supervisor Mardi Wormhoudt and Capitola representative Dennis Norton opposed the amendment, saying it diluted the commission's message. But the other commissioners supported the amendment, saying the county needs to pay as much attention to its highways as its bikeways.

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— **Tim Fitzmaurice,**
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