

Bus commuters still want service

Highway 17 has reopened

By KEITH MURAOKA
Sentinel staff writer

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SANTA CRUZ — While it's back to business as usual for most commuters on Highway 17 today, others who have been commuting via bus have already started a petition drive to continue bus service over the newly reopened route to Santa Clara County.

More than 1,000 signatures will be delivered Monday to transportation officials in both Santa Cruz and Santa Clara counties, said bus-rider Carol Franchi of Felton, one of the coordinators of the petition drive.

However, there is no word as to whether the emergency bus service, which started soon after the Oct. 17 earthquake when Highway 17 was closed, will continue.

Highway 17, which was reopened Sunday, had been restricted to Highway Patrol-led car pool-convoys while \$5 million in repairs were done to the 11 miles of mountainous roadway between Scotts Valley and Los Gatos, which an estimated 23,000 Santa Cruz County residents commute on daily.

Drivers Sunday reported no delays and a relatively easy passage over 17, which had been blocked by earthquake-caused landslides.

"It felt strange not to be escorted by the highway patrol," Vivian Mason, a records clerk with the Sheriff's Office, said Sunday. "The traffic was real light. I saw the CHP helping stranded motorists and it looked like it was back to normal."

A CHP spokesman said that officers were elated that the road has reopened without restriction. No problems are

anticipated for today's commute, he said.

Bus commuters, however, are hoping they don't have to join the car commute.

Santa Cruz County Metropolitan Transit District General Manager Scott Galloway said he hopes the buses can continue. However, as of Friday, he was still in the middle of talks with Santa Clara County Metropolitan Transit District officials, who are jointly running the buses. "We should know by Tuesday," Galloway said.

Franchi, who said she's been commuting to San Jose for 10 years, loves riding

the bus. "I had no idea how much I hated to drive until I got on the bus and had a chance to relax," she said.

The petition drive literally ran by itself, Franchi added. "It was the easiest thing I've ever done. People were almost mobbing me to sign."

Ridership has continually increased on the bus-runs from Scotts Valley to downtown San Jose, Galloway said. Ridership is up to 500-700 daily.

"The park-and-ride lot is so full, we had to grade a lot for another 100 spaces," Galloway said.

Old San Jose Road closed in daytime

By KEITH MURAOKA
Sentinel staff writer

SOQUEL — Old San Jose Road will be closed to through traffic, including residents, during daytime hours beginning today while numerous potential landslides are removed.

The daytime closure is expected to last 2½ weeks.

The road, which is being used by some as an alternative to Highway 17, will be closed between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m. most weekdays until approximately Dec. 6. No work will take place Thursday or Friday due to Thanksgiving.

The slide removal will be within two specific areas, said county Public Works Department Construction Engineer Dick Jansen. One will be approximately 5½ miles north of Soquel Drive for around 2½ miles, with

the other approximately four miles south of Summit Road for 1½ miles.

Jansen said area residents will also be restricted from through traffic between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m.

"We're going to have a crane sitting in the middle of the road, completely blocking it," he said. "People living above the work will have to leave from that direction (toward Summit Road), while people from below the work will have to leave from the bottom (toward Soquel Village)."

Allowing Old San Jose Road residents to get to and from work was the reason for holding off the start of work until 8 a.m. and ending work at 5 p.m., Jansen added.

Granite Construction and Ponza Brothers Construction will be doing the work.

"The question is, will people go back to their normal routine or will they have learned their lesson?"

— Walt Allen,
county rideshare program

Transportation officials hope that commuters do not simply return to their bad habits of driving alone.

Santa Cruz County Transportation Commission Executive Director Linda Wilshusen is already fearful of horrendous traffic jams on Highway 1 once Highway 17 reopens.

Ironically, Highway 1 from Santa Cruz through mid-county, which is normally bumper-to-bumper during rush hour, has been moving freely since Highway 17 has been closed. It also has become one of the best routes for cross-town travel since Soquel Drive has been jammed due to the closures of the Murray Street and East Cliff Drive bridges due to earthquake damage.

Galloway warned that even when Highway 17 reopens, over-the-hill transportation could still be hectic with repair work continuing and the onslaught of winter rains.

Walt Allen, coordinator of the Santa Cruz County Rideshare Program, also hopes car-poolers will continue to share rides. He estimated that about 1,000 new people are now car-pooling as a result of the Highway 17 restrictions.

"The question is, will people go back to their normal routine or will they have learned their lesson?" he asked.