

City will pursue bridge replacement

Bridge

By J.M. BROWN

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SANTA CRUZ — The City Council voted unanimously to continue seeking state approval to build a new Highway 1 bridge over the San Lorenzo River.

The project is designed to enhance safety by getting rid of the 57-year-old bridge, one of the oldest in the state's freeway system, and removing a center pier that collects debris during heavy floods.

The vote does not lock in the

SAN LORENZO RIVER SPAN

city to the current proposed design of a new bridge, which would be to add a lane on the southbound side and two lanes on the northbound side. The design will come back to the council after environmental review.

Councilman Micah Posner, a longtime bicycling advocate, said a widened bridge would only encourage more vehicle traffic.

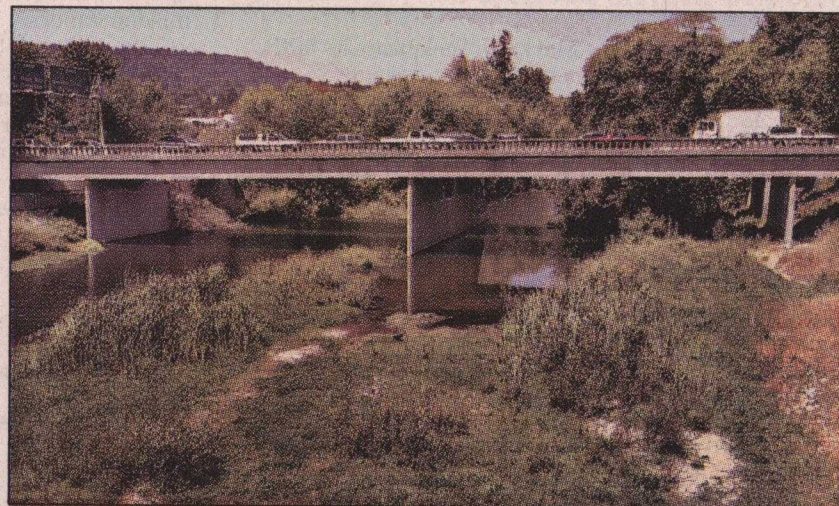
"We rarely do capacity-increasing projects," Posner said. "If we

add lanes, it is more capacity. There is no way around it."

Posner noted 45 emails sent to the council opposed to a bridge expansion compared to seven in favor.

But Councilwoman Pamela Comstock took Posner to task for the emails, saying much of the opposition stemmed from an email Posner sent to constituents late Friday night suggesting the widening was designed to serve traffic for a new big box store in

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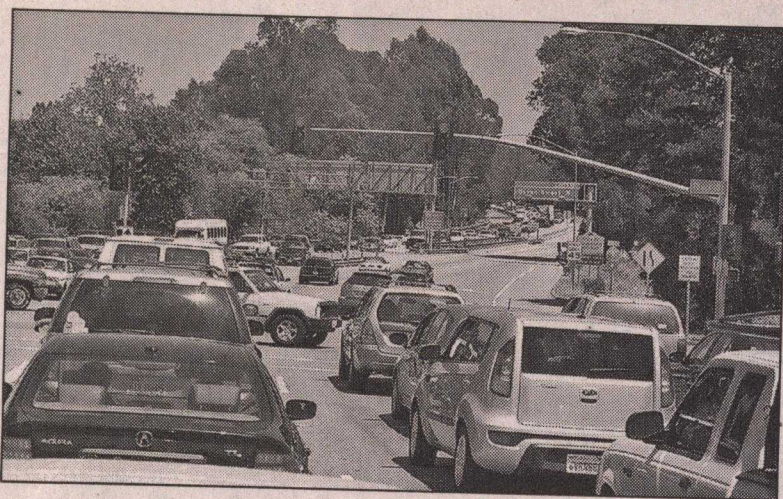
The Highway 1 bridge near Highway 9 spans the San Lorenzo River.

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The intersection of highways 1 and 9 is often clogged with traffic.

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BRIDGE

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the Harvey West area. An economic objective approved by the council earlier Tuesday was, in fact, to encourage a large retailer to the industrial zone, but not a specific store.

"Whether or not these stores are helpful to our local economy, they generate an extraordinary amount of sales tax revenue to the city government," Posner said in his email. "They also generate an extraordinary amount of car trips. Moreover, the big corporations that build them want to know that the road system around the proposed site can accommodate these huge increases in traffic."

Tuesday evening, Posner acknowledged he shouldn't have used the name Walmart in his email, saying he didn't realize it had a negative connotation compared to Home Depot or other large retailers.

"That was false information that you put out," Comstock told Posner from the dais. She added she supported the bridge replacement and making a state-required payment of \$37,000 in expenses for reviewing the plans because, "It's our job to take care of basic infrastructure."

While safety issues are paramount, the bridge rebuild is also primarily designed to reduce long-standing congestion in the area, mostly stemming from the nearby intersection with Highway 9. By the end of May, the city

anticipates completion of initial plans for the bridge and environmental analysis of the intersection improvements.

Replacing the bridge is estimated to cost \$12 million to \$16 million. Adding lanes on the existing bridge instead was projected to cost \$10 million to \$12 million, but would have also required seismic upgrades.

Tuesday night, the council also reviewed \$27.5 million in capital improvement projects for the fiscal year starting July 1. They include improvements in the parks, transportation, economic development and water.

Final decisions will come during adoption of the city budget July 9 after departmental budget hearings set for June 10 and 11.