

# Wooden bridge reopens to cars

Bridges

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SANTA CRUZ CONSIDERS HISTORIC STRUCTURE 'A MAJOR SAVE'

By Terri Morgan

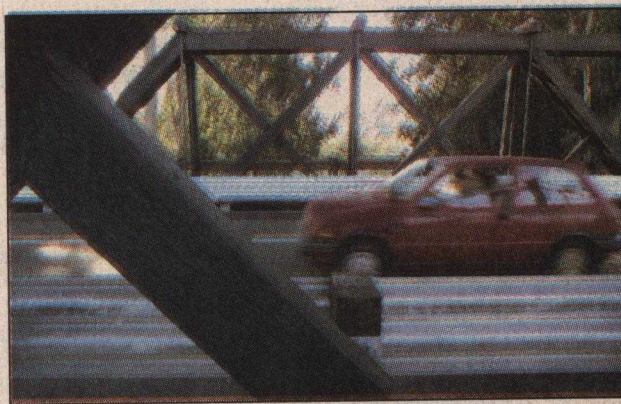
Special to the Mercury News

Residents living on the west side of Santa Cruz regained a cherished shortcut Monday when the historic wooden West Cliff Drive bridge reopened to southbound traffic.

The 24-foot-wide, 82-year-old bridge near Washington and Beach streets was closed to vehicle traffic in 1992 after severe termite and moisture damage was discovered.

A year later, the bridge — the last known example of Howe truss architecture in use in the state — was reopened to bicycles and pedestrians.

But for the past eight years, drivers have been forced to detour through a busy intersection in front of the municipal wharf. Now, mo-



PAULINE LUBENS — MERCURY NEWS

The 82-year-old bridge on West Cliff Drive was closed to vehicle traffic for eight years, cutting off a scenic ocean-view route, after termite and moisture damage was discovered.

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torists heading toward the ocean from the southern end of Pacific Avenue once again will be able to take the short and scenic route.

Historic preservationists fought to save the bridge, which almost was demolished and replaced with a modern concrete span. Citizens rallied and recruited assistance from local, state and federal politicians to secure funding to refurbish the bridge. Rebuilding the structure was especially important because Santa Cruz had lost many historic buildings during the 1989 earthquake.

"This really is a major save for the community," Santa Cruz City Councilwoman Katherine Beiers said.

Southern Pacific Railroad built the bridge in 1918 over its tracks using a design patented by William Howe in 1840. The bridge was included in the 1989 Santa Cruz Historic Building Survey and in "Historic Highway Bridges of California," published by the state Department of Transportation the following year.

The Santa Cruz City Council approved the \$2.3 million renovation project in 1995. Federal funds for bridge construction paid for 80 percent of the project; Southern Pacific and the city each contributed 10 percent.

The bridge rehabilitation put some bicyclists and motorists at odds. Cyclists had opposed allowing motorists on the narrow span, charging they posed a safety hazard to riders. Drivers wanted the bridge to continue being a shortcut between downtown and West Cliff Drive.

The reopened bridge allows motor vehicle traffic — but in only one direction — and two-way foot and bike traffic.

What both sides got was something in between. The reopened bridge allows motor vehicle traffic — but in only one direction — and two-way foot and bike traffic.

Safety features were incorporated in the renovation project, which took 11 months to complete. Guardrails and solid wooden and metal fences separate the roadway from four- and five-foot-wide wooden pedestrian and bicycle paths on both sides of the bridge.

### IF YOU'RE INTERESTED

A grand opening ceremony for the West Cliff Drive bridge is set for 10 a.m. next Tuesday.