

SC study says Costco won't snarl traffic

By **MARTHA MENDOZA**
Sentinel staff writer

SANTA CRUZ — Although the patience of local drivers is already tested at the busy intersection of Highway 9 and Highway 1, opening a Costco store near Harvey West park won't make things significantly worse.

At least it won't according to a new city study about the possible effects of building a proposed Costco store at Sylvania Avenue and Harvey West Boulevard next year.

"I don't think it's going to have any major impact because most of the trips to Costco are taken during the noon hour, which isn't when that intersection is at its worst," said Santa Cruz Principal Planner Ken Thomas.

Larry Beeman, owner of Bocci's Cellar in Harvey West, says the report's conclusions are wrong.

"It will be complete gridlock all day long if they don't fix that interchange," he said. "Traffic's going to be a disaster."

Beeman said traffic is already "a complete zoo" between 3 and 5 p.m. when employees from the Santa Cruz Operation and Plantronics are heading home.

According to the report, more than 2,250 carloads of customers would be expected to visit Costco warehouse daily, generating an ad-

ditional 5,600 daily trips through one of the city's busiest intersections.

But according to the study, most of those trips would be during "off-peak" hours — late mornings and early afternoons — rather than during the 8 a.m. and 5 p.m. commute hours.

Traffic studies show that about 56,000 cars travel through the Highway 1/Highway 9 intersection on weekdays, and 48,000 on weekends.

Plans to rebuild the intersection have been discussed in local traffic commissions and committees for more than a decade, but Caltrans' Dennis Fosler says there is a "low likelihood" that a full-fledged interchange, with ramps and an overpass, will ever be built at Highway 1 and Highway 9.

"There are just too many difficulties in the design, because it is so close to the Highway 1/Highway 17 interchange," said Fosler.

However, he said, the state, the county and the city will probably all eventually get together and widen the intersection, adding lanes and sidewalks.

In addition, Fosler says the nearby Highway 1/Highway 17 fishhook interchange is slated for rebuilding in 1996.

Parks and Recreation Director

Jim Lang says he doesn't expect major problems for people who swim or use the fields at Harvey West Park, because their hours probably won't coincide with Costco customers.

"It won't be that significant of a burden," he said.

Santa Clara traffic engineer Chris Fernandez says he had anticipated similar traffic impacts when Costco was built in an industrial area of his city, but so far there haven't been any major backups.

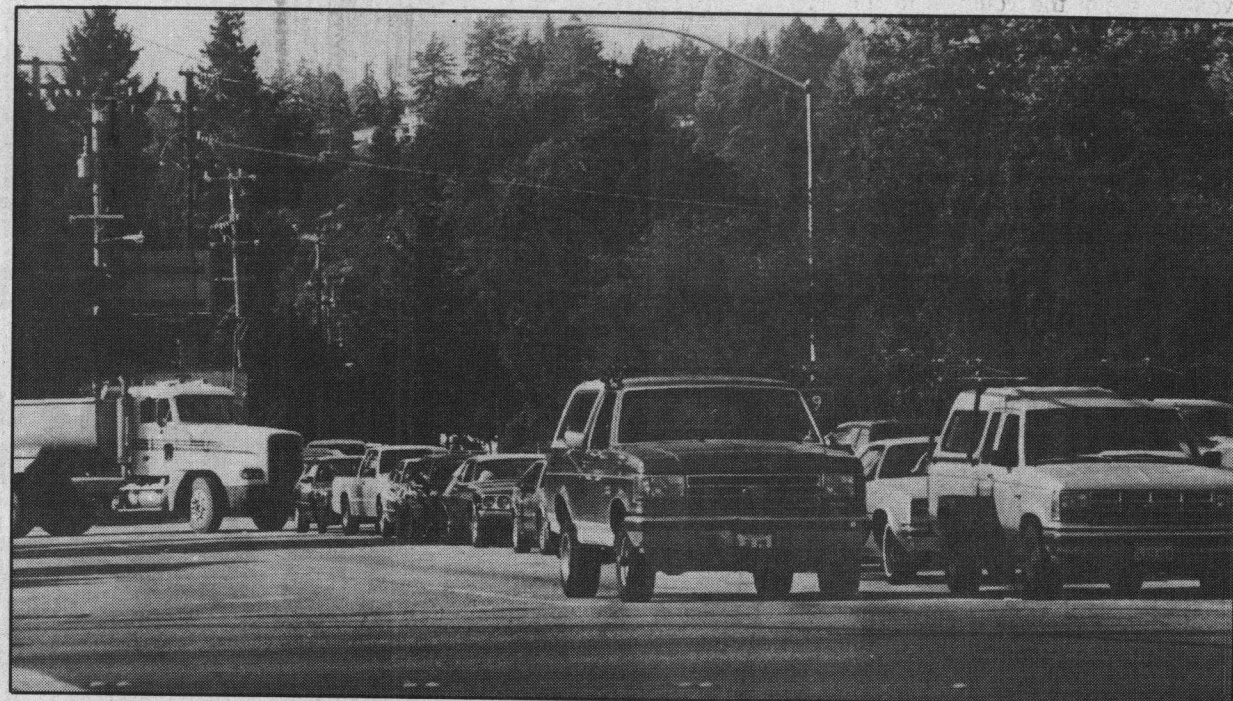
"Surprisingly, we haven't had a problem," said Fernandez.

He said that Costco customers tend to go to the store during "off-peak" hours, spreading out heavy traffic hours throughout the day.

In Chico, associate civil engineer Matt Thompson says they avoided problems by designing the industrial area surrounding their Costco store for lots of traffic.

"We anticipated heavy retail traffic, and we sized our streets and intersections accordingly," he said.

Last November, Costco Wholesale Corp. bought a 10.6-acre site in the Harvey West area, contingent upon receipt of all relevant building permits. The environmental impact report, which is still in draft form, says traffic would be



Dan Coyro/Sentinel

City study says traffic at Highway 9-Highway 1 intersection won't be affected by Costco store.

the only significant, unavoidable impact.

Building the 122,000-square-foot structure on one-third of an acre of seasonal wetlands is not considered a serious problem, because the wetlands are not home to any

rare or endangered plants or animals, according to the report.

Even so, the city has applied for a special permit from the Army Corps of Engineers to build on the wetlands.

Costco Chairman Jeff Brotman

said Monday he couldn't comment on the report because he hasn't read it yet. The draft Environmental Impact Report on the Costco Wholesale-Retail Warehouse is available for public review and comment at City Hall until Oct. 14.