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Supervisors support gas tax hike for repairs

County supervisors have unanimously pledged their support to a temporary, one-cent increase in the gas tax statewide to get storm-damaged, public roads repaired throughout the state.

Without some type of aid, it could take this county 10 years to repair all the roads damaged by two years of storms.

Supervisors on Tuesday agreed to send their message to Sacramento and to contact boards of supervisors in other storm-ravaged counties to gain their support.

State Sen. Henry Mello, D-Watsonville, originally proposed the statewide tax, but dropped his proposal after learning the governor wouldn't support it.

Instead, he's drafting a bill which would allow a board of supervisors, on a four-fifths vote, to impose temporary increases in the gas tax to raise funds locally for public road repairs.

But a statewide tax is still Mello's first choice, Supervisors' Chairman Joe Cucchiara said. He said he received a request from Mello's office for board support of a statewide, temporary increase in the gas tax.

Supervisor Gary Patton said a statewide tax is preferable to a local tax because it would cost consumers less.

Even if the county raised the gas tax locally by 5 cents temporarily, it still wouldn't raise enough to repair all the roads, Patton stated.

"When 41 out of 58 counties have suffered a disaster . . . this is an appropriate occasion for the state Legislature to — at a much lower amount of taxation statewide — to take care of the problem," Patton said.

"A one-cent tax on a statewide basis for a very limited amount of time . . . can eliminate all of the problems on roads statewide," he added.

Patton stressed in his motion that the statewide tax should be adequate to raise the local share of storm repairs. The federal government covers about half of the cost.

Patton made this point after Supervisor Dan Forbus worried aloud that a statewide tax may not be distributed equitably and Santa Cruz County could lose out.

Forbus added he doesn't

believe a statewide tax will make it through the state Legislature. He said he supports it reluctantly "just because there's that much damage out there."

Much of that damage is in the summit area of Forbus' first (Live Oak-Soquel) district where only one lane of Laurel Road remains as the only access for 30 families.

Patton, wanting to make sure some form of aid will be forthcoming for road repairs, got the rest of the board to direct County Ad-

ministrative Officer George Newell to:

- Make a damage claim to the federal government to cover all road resurfacing not specifically related to a slide or slip-out.

- Explore getting a loan from the state to help with road repair costs.

- Explore the creation of local or countywide assessment districts to raise funds directly from property owners for road repairs.

- Actively support Mello's

bill allowing boards of supervisors to impose local gas tax increases.

Supervisors this morning also reaffirmed the continuation of the state of emergency and approved a resolution authorizing the Army to construct an emergency, four-wheel drive exit from Lompico. Work on this exit began last week.

Granite Construction Co., under contract with the federal government, was expected to begin work on an access road into Lompico

today. The access road will allow traffic to move around a slide isolating the mountain community.

A 40-ton crane was brought into Lompico Tuesday to remove debris out of Lompico Creek so that large drainage pipes can be set in place.

The county is hoping to have another controlled drive-through out of Lompico Friday and shuttle bus service is expected to begin soon on lower Lompico Road.