

# Santa Cruz beachside bikeway concept OK'd

By Ken McLaughlin  
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The Santa Cruz City Council gave conceptual approval Tuesday for a Beach Street bikeway that will cost more than \$530,000 and use concrete medians, curbs and fences to separate cyclists from motorists.

But the spirited discussion that preceded the 6-0 vote indicated that the city staff still has a lot of work to do to appease Santa Cruz Seaside Co., owner of the Beach Boardwalk amusement park.

The biggest issue is that the bikeway will encourage more people to use a railroad trestle near Third Street that creates a serious liability issue for Seaside Co., said John Robinson, the company's community relations manager.

"We're not against the bike path, but the city has to take responsibility for what it's creating," he said.

Robinson, who noted that insurance rates for amusement parks have skyrocketed since the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks, said the Beach Boardwalk's insurer had told Seaside officials that it couldn't accept the bike plan because more cyclists would be funneled onto Sea-

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side Co. land. Robinson said he spoke to the city's risk manager, who told him the city wouldn't accept legal responsibility.

By the Boardwalk, merchants haven't exactly fallen in love with a project that began in May to remove 92 parking spaces and create an experimental bike lane. Robinson said three stores closed when the parking spaces were eliminated.

"It makes me wonder if you don't cherish the economic vitality of the beach area," Marshall Millner, owner of the Sun Shops on the Boardwalk, told the council.

Some residents wonder how the council can spend more than a half-million dollars on a bike lane when it might soon have to lay off as many as 100 city employees because of the current fiscal crisis.

"It's amazing you can find money for recreational purposes . . . as the homeless are pushed out of the city limits and you use the police to hound us like dogs," said Michael Williams, a homeless

man. "You're disgusting."

But traffic engineer Ron Marquez explained that the council couldn't shift the money for the bike lane into the city's general fund. According to Cheryl Schmitt, the city's bike and pedestrian coordinator, the city is getting \$459,000 in federal funds that come from a gas tax, as well as \$72,000 from Union Pacific to improve a railway crossing.

"You can't take gas-tax money and use it to keep people employed for the rest of the year," Marquez said.

Despite concerns about the liability issue and some design concerns, the council voted to give the green light to the project so it didn't send a message that it was against it.

If the council didn't approve it in concept Tuesday, some political activists would no doubt twist it as a vote "against" the project, said Vice Mayor Scott Kennedy.

City Councilman Mike Rotkin was absent from the meeting.

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