

# Highway widening shocker

Highways - 2000  
UCSC chancellor to students and staff: Stay off High Street

By **DAN WHITE**  
SENTINEL STAFF WRITER

SANTA CRUZ — Go to Westside neighborhood meetings and you'll hear residents take jabs at UC Santa Cruz, often accusing campus officials of foisting traffic and parking problems on those who live near campus.

But acting UC Santa Cruz Chancellor Martin Chemers says he wants to address Westside traffic troubles. For starters, he's asking UCSC staff, faculty and students to avoid Highland Avenue and High Street



**CHEMERS**  
Cheered  
by neighbors

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5-21-04  
Report says some work 25 years off

By **HEATHER BOERNER**  
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SANTA CRUZ — What if construction on the final portion of the Highway 1 widening project didn't begin for another 25 years?

That's the question the Santa Cruz Regional Transportation Commission grappled with Thursday, when a new financial scenario on the proposed \$530 million transportation ballot measure showed that's exactly what

could happen.

"That's not going to fly with my constituency," said Mid-County Supervisor Ellen Pirie, an RTC commissioner. "I used to joke that I wanted this to be done while I still had a driver's license. But it doesn't seem like a joke anymore."

The new scenario shows the final phase of the three-step widening process, now described as the area of Highway 1 between State Park Drive and Larkin Val-

ley Road, might not start for 25 years.

Pirie and others had initially assumed the \$330 million they could collect from the ballot measure funds would mean the highway would be widened, first from Morrissey Boulevard to State Park Drive, then from State Park Drive to Larkin Valley Road, with no delay between sections. But the proposed expenditure plan adds

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## Highway

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other projects to the ballot measure, which will get funding every year.

So highway widening went from getting 90 percent of the money for the first 12 to 15 years to 64 percent of it every year. The expected result? Work on the project drags on.

Progress on the widening would also depend on how the commission plans to finance it if the measure passes in November. Assistant County Administrative Officer Pat Busch said the current plan is to issue three successive bonds to pay for the widening.

Bonding for the money means the commission would get money up front and pay for the bond with sales tax revenue.

The commission could take out one large bond, but that would mean paying higher interest in the long run. So Busch recommends three bonds.

The first phase of the widening project would take up most of the bonding capacity, however. And that means delays in financing the start of the South County section of the widening.

"It was never on the table that we'd be starting any part of the project in 25 years," Pirie said after the meeting. "We did want them to be conservative (in their analysis), but at the same time we'd like the project to be done in a reason-

able amount of time. You can't tell people that their bike path won't be purchased for 15 years. At the same time, you can't tell people who want the highway widened that they aren't going to get that for 25 years."

The current ballot measure includes money for the Highway 1 widening, including carpool lanes, bike bridges and express buses, as well as funds for the bike and pedestrian rail-trail along the Union Pacific corridor, local roads, senior and disabled services, Highway 17 safety and the Pajaro train station.

So to speed up the widening, RTC commissioner and county Supervisor Jan Beautz asked Busch to change one of his assumptions: If the economy

grows faster than 1 percent adjusted for inflation — and over the past 10 years it's grown at an average of more than 2 percent — the commission can assume the money for the third bond would be available sooner.

Busch was asked to look at how quickly the project could be completed with the assumption of a 1.25 percent growth rate. The commission will consider the new scenario at its June 3 meeting.

If that doesn't deliver the widening in a reasonable period of time, however, Pirie said she doesn't know what the commission will do.

"It's just not acceptable this way," she said.

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