

Now that it's almost built, transit center fits the mall

By PAUL BEATTY
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SANTA CRUZ — There was an air of affront among our town-fathers and town-mothers when plans for the new Santa Cruz Metro bus center were unfolded in the fall of 1981.

"What's this?" they asked each other, "A holdover of the Last Picture Show?" "A garage for Kaisers and Fraziers?" "A return to the bubble-gum architecture of the 1940's and 50's?"

"Ugh," said more than one city official, "we don't want it here."

"It's not worthy of the Pacific Garden Mall," said an outspoken zoning board member when looking at the rounded countours of the center on paper.

But, today, the bus depot (whoops, "intermodal transfer facility") is there in all its art moderne — or is that really art deco — grandeur.

And, it looks good.

Just right, say passers-by, like it belongs on the mall.

An understatement. It fits. Like Santa Cruz.

The transit center cost \$3,145,000, a price tag that includes \$1 million for land and \$300,000 for extension of the Pacific Garden Mall. The town and street merchants got the mall extension free of charge. Slightly more than half of the total cost came from state funding.

However, the city lost some parking spaces and some downtown merchants and residents have complained loudly about that.

Buses will start using the center in June and General Manager Scott Galloway says that 10,000 people a day will go through the center.

"That's a lot of walk-by traffic for merchants along this street," he points out. And, the word is that some merchants who were going to sell when the center was proposed, have decided to stay. Other property in the neighborhood is going up in value, he says.

The transit center is still operating off the street along Soquel, between Pacific and Front, an operation that has been less than desirable to the public, city officials and the transit district, itself.

Buses are scheduled to start using the center's broad through streets in June. The center provides for four lanes of parked buses and four lanes of moving buses.

The interior of the main building and the "bus island" will provide lease spaces for businesses and for offices of the district managers.

It will have a security force, janitors and even a bathroom attendant who unofficially can accept tips for keeping the restrooms clean.

The information booth is geared — as is

the rest of the facility — for the handicapped. It has a phone for the deaf for both outgoing calls and in-house communications.

Galloway's a little bit in love with it.

"We've set it up to be self-supporting, for the leases to pay for the security and the janitorial work," he says.

At the main building, which will offer heated refuge when the weather is bad, there's going to be an indoor-out restaurant and some office space upstairs. One room that will be used for a rest break area, someday will be the communications room for the center, overlooking the bus lanes.

There's a couple of major covered areas for waiting for the bus to come by and one of them will be backed by enclosed art displays.

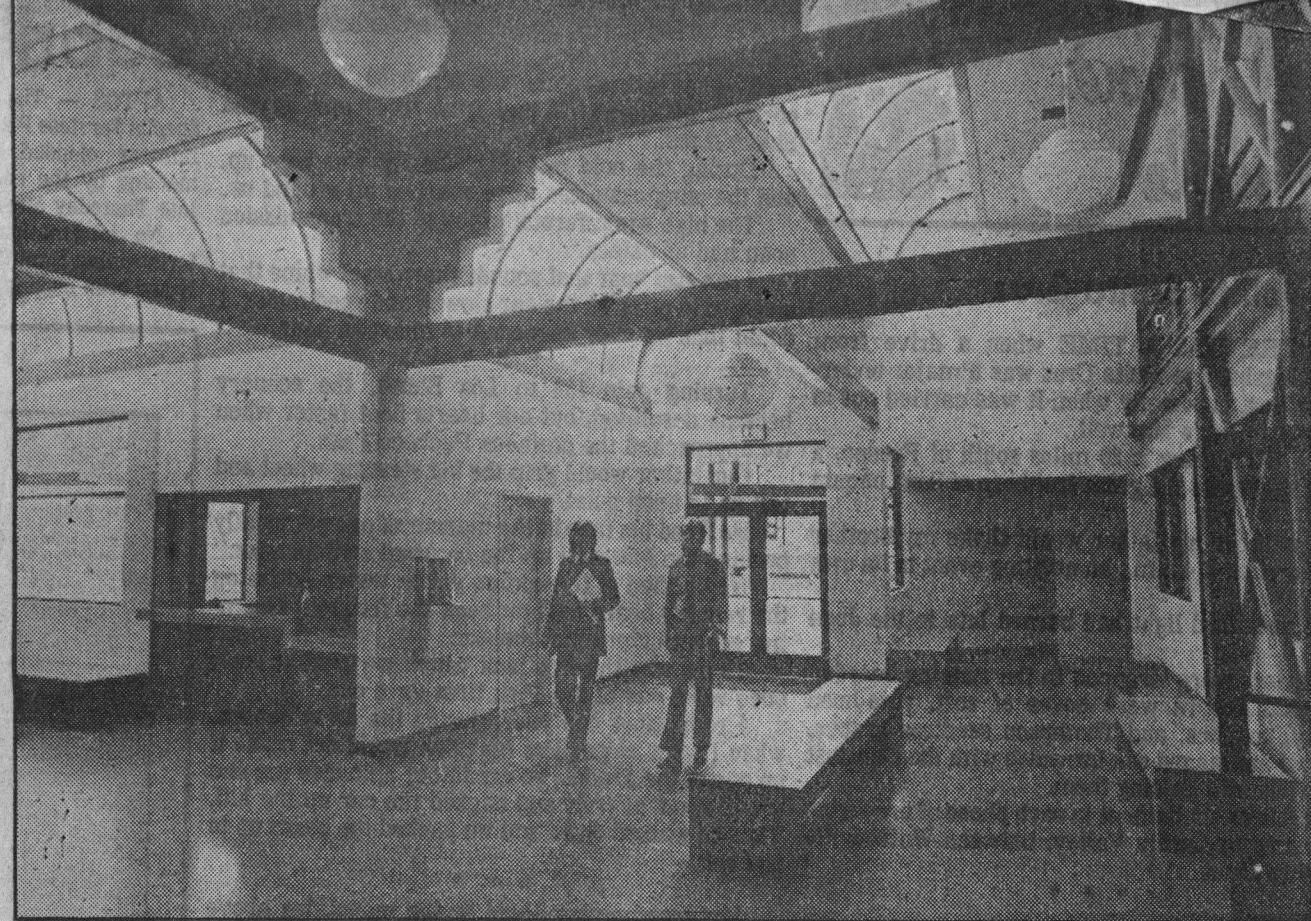
Passengers will be able to buy a taco and other Mexican food specialties, yogurt, flowers, coffee and orange juice from the island while waiting.

Galloway says the architecture is "sort of an art deco."

He may be wrong.

Edna Kimbro, chairperson of the Historical Preservation Commission, says, "No. It's art moderne. Rather, a revival of art moderne from the 1940s.

"Someday," she claims, "future historians will throw themselves down in awe when they come up these buildings."



Scott Galloway and Ed van der Zande in main lobby and waiting area

Sentinel photos
by Pete Amos

