

Riverside Bridge open to traffic

By TOM LONG
Sentinel staff writer

3-13-91

SANTA CRUZ — It was a classic hometown moment, the reopening of the Riverside Avenue Bridge.

At 9 a.m. Tuesday, a throng of city officials, construction workers, business people and just plain folks gathered on the landlubber side of the bridge, waiting for the proverbial ribbon to be cut.

The main connector between tourist

traffic and the Boardwalk-beach area was about to be opened for the first time since the Loma Prieta earthquake in 1989.

The arching, concrete bridge was first damaged in January 1982 when a rain-swollen San Lorenzo River slammed logs into the structure, damaging its supports. The old bridge was a key factor in the federal government designating most of downtown Santa Cruz as a flood zone.

During high river flow the bridge could become a dam and inundate the downtown if logs and debris backed up against its supports.

Because of that threat the city decided to replace the bridge and scheduled demolition for the spring of 1990.

But the Oct. 17 quake finished off the span. During the 7.1-magnitude quake, the bridge sank several inches. The city

Please see BRIDGE — A12



Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel

New sidewalk observation areas allow pedestrians to stop and enjoy the view.

A-12 — Wednesday, March 13, 1991 — Santa Cruz Sentinel

Bridge reopens

Continued from Page A1

closed the bridge and it was demolished in December 1989.

City officials were successful in convincing the federal government to pay for the demolition, arguing the earthquake made the bridge unusable.

As soon as the bridge was removed, the Federal Emergency Management Agency lifted the flood zone designation from downtown.

Construction cost \$7.1 million, City Manager Dick Wilson said. Total costs, including demolition and design work amounted to \$8.5 million. Federal highway funds covered most of the construction costs. Federal and state emergency funds paid for the demolition.

The bridge was supposed to reopen last week, but heavy rains kept crews from painting traffic lanes. So the event was postponed and the frustrations continued.

Tuesday those frustrations came to an end.

At the opening ceremony, a crowd surrounded Mayor Jane Yokoyama as she stood atop a small footstool and spoke into a microphone, her words carried through an amplified speaker the size of a dinner plate.

"There will be no more detour

going right through the downtown business district," she declared proudly.

Since the bridge closed, tourists and locals alike have endured a maze of twisting detours that have caused countless clogs in the downtown and beach areas. As many as 30,000 cars a day during the summer inched their way through skinny lanes set between traffic cones to get to the sands of the Main Beach.

The Santa Cruz High School marching band walked across town to join in the opening ceremony, clad in bright red and white regalia, carrying tubas, trombones and such.

TV cameramen fought for position as Yokoyama took scissors to the ribbon, vying for the ultimate ribbon-cutting shot.

The band struck up a march and took off across the new bridge. A businessman dressed in a suit with jogging shorts carried a banner promoting a Chamber of Commerce event.

The march was over in about a minute-and-a-half.

It's not a very long bridge, after all. Only a few hundred feet long.

But it was nice to have it back.



Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel

The Santa Cruz High School band leads a procession during the first official crossing at opening ceremonies Tuesday.