

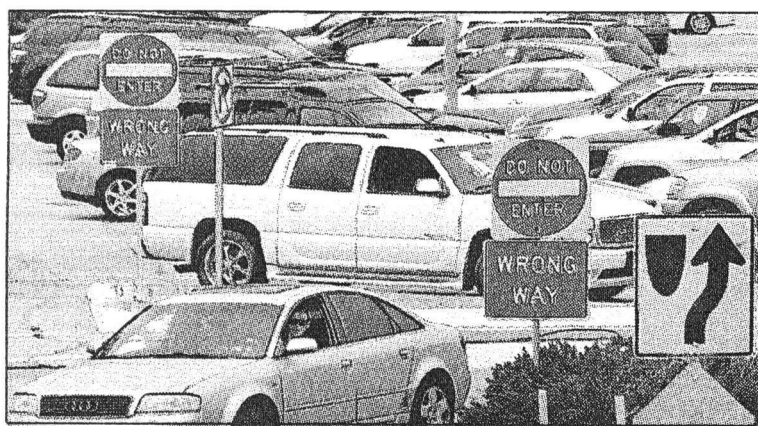
KEVIN JOHNSON/SENTINEL

Resident Bill Comfort stands next to the intersection at the Rio del Mar beach parking lot Friday. Comfort is leading the effort to replace the intersection with a safer roundabout.

Roundabout could be 'round the bend

Traffic Patterns
If \$200,000 grant secured,
Aptos intersection will get new rotary

By SHANNA MCCORD
smccord@santacruzsentinel.com



KEVIN JOHNSON/SENTINEL

A car approaches the busy intersection at Rio del Mar beach in Aptos on Friday afternoon.

APTOS — The confusing intersection at the entrance of Rio del Mar State Beach is slated for an overhaul if the county Public Works Department can snag a \$200,000 grant from the Monterey Bay Unified Air Pollution Control District.

The bean-shaped intersection that draws together Aptos Beach Drive, Rio Del Mar Boulevard, Beach Drive and the beachfront parking lot is a saga that goes back at least 10 years with residents and former Supervisor Ellen Pirie rooting for a roundabout to correct traffic problems such as drivers not knowing which way to go.

The hang-up for the past decade has been lack of funding from the county. The new roundabout's estimated

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cost — with design, construction and landscaping — is \$250,000.

Supervisor Zach Friend picked up where Pirie left off in pursuing the roundabout, and said he is committed to securing funding in the 2013-14 budget for the county Department of Public Works to cover the \$50,000 not included in the air district grant.

"Cars struggle with understanding the current design," Friend said. "They're making illegal turns and no one's yielding, especially during tourist season."

"The current design is not environmentally friendly or

good for traffic flow."

The roundabout plan involves making the main central island a circle and replacing stop signs with yield signs and painting markings and arrows on the road to define the appropriate direction for entering and exiting traffic.

Making all traffic yield would improve flow and safety through the intersection, Friend and others said.

Longtime Aptos resident Bill Comfort, head of the Rio Del Mar Improvement Association, said his biggest complaint is cars traveling down the steep Rio Del Mar Boulevard don't have a stop sign and barrel into the traffic flow with little regard to other drivers. Some drivers coming from Aptos Beach Drive cut across the top of

the intersection without following it around, Comfort said.

"This is a bad intersection period," Comfort, 72, said. "I think a roundabout that makes everyone yield will be a lot clearer for drivers and clearer for pedestrians, too."

A handful of Aptos residents have signed a petition opposing the new roundabout, saying the yield signs will make the intersection more dangerous.

They also fear the proposed construction of three islands will become a destination for skateboarders, which they believe could bring added noise and security issues for the neighborhood.

The owner of Rio Market said she will lose the 30-min-

ute curb parking in front of her store when the roundabout is built.

"It's not practical," Sheuehwey Cheng said. "It's been this way 50 years. Why change it?"

Deadline for the air district grant is the end of June. Applications will be reviewed in August and winners announced in September, Friend said.

The district has about \$1.5 million to hand out for regional projects that improve air quality. Roundabouts are identified as preferred projects for receiving the grants, said Friend, who also serves on the air district board.

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