

COUNTY

Highway 1 widening study OK'd

Transportation panel
wants to know whether
toll lanes are feasible

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SCOTTS VALLEY — The Highway 1 high-occupancy toll lanes are one step closer to reality, or at least feasibility.

The Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission approved in an 8-2 vote Thursday a \$330,000 feasibility study of the proposed toll lanes. They would widen Highway 1 to three lanes each direction from the Fishhook in Santa Cruz to State Park Drive in Aptos.

The additional lanes would be free for car-poolers and public transportation vehicles but single drivers would be charged a toll.

The vote Thursday was the first substantial action the commission has taken on the subject since it agreed to study it a year ago. The research will begin immediately with a study of whether there's actually room for two new lanes on the narrow strip of Highway 1 and how much money it will cost.

Then, transportation planners will begin looking for ways to finance the project and seek approval for it from local residents. Commission Executive Director Linda Wilshusen assured the commissioners Thursday that the project could be abandoned at any point in the process if it becomes clear that there either isn't enough room, not enough money or not enough support.

"We first have to ask the question, can we even fit this in here," she told the commission. "If we decide that we can fit it in, then we will move ahead with how to fund it and surveys of the public. But if we know up front that it's just not going to work, we can stop the process right there."

Most commissioners agreed with the feasibility study, \$264,000 of which will be federal money, but two said they

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LINDA
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COMMISSION
DIRECTOR

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don't like the tone of the feasibility study.

Santa Cruz County representative Andy Shiffrin, who sat on the commission as an alternate for Supervisor Mardi Wormhoudt, asked several questions about how much commissioning the study obligated the commission to go ahead with the project.

And Santa Cruz Vice Mayor Tim Fitzmaurice objected to what he called the "happy talk" of the project descrip-

travel in carpools," he said. "But we ought to be honest about this. This toll lane is intended to benefit the wealthy single-occupancy car driver who can afford to buy a pass out of the traffic. I don't like that. Low-income people are not the people shouting to have this thing installed."

Oscar Rios, a commissioner and mayor of Watsonville, agreed that the toll lanes probably aren't going to benefit poor people as much as rich commuters, but he said he also would like to see some relief to the traffic congestion plaguing the South County.

"I agree, Tim," he said. "But I also