

✓ Brace for SC bridge Bridges upgrade

By KAREN CLARK
Sentinel staff writer

SANTA CRUZ.— Drivers may want to avoid the Water Street bridge between next week and, oh, say, Groundhog Day 1997, as work begins on a \$4.5 million reconstruction.

Traffic lanes on the bridge will be reduced from four to two as early as the middle of next week to prepare for the project's first phase, a seismic upgrade of the 60-year-old span across the San Lorenzo River.

During Phase 2, the northern part of the bridge will be replaced to match the improvements already made on the southern portion.

The old concrete arches under the bridge also will be removed, which will raise the bottom of the bridge to make it less likely that trees and other debris will continue to clog the passage and cause flooding concerns.

"It's always exciting when we get to build something," said Hank Myers, an associate engineer for the city's Public Works Department. The project was to have begun early last year, but was delayed by design concerns.

During the yearlong project, one lane of traffic in each direction will be switched to the north half of the bridge, said Myers, along with two bicycle lanes and one pedestrian walkway.

The project is being funded largely by the federal Highway Replacement and Rehabilitation Program.

The plan is part of a larger flood-control project written by the Army Corps of Engineers, which calls for raising the flood walls of the San Lorenzo River between Highway 1 and Monterey Bay.

Another part of the city's flood-control effort calls for the Soquel Avenue bridge to be reinforced and raised. Myers said design work has been funded, but federal grants still must be approved for the actual construction.

Farther down the line, the Broadway-Laurel bridge also is in line for a seismic retrofit, but Myers said traffic would not be affected during that project.

RGW Construction of Fremont has been hired as contractors for the Water Street bridge project. The company rebuilt the bridge over the Carmel River in 34 days after last year's massive flooding in Monterey County.