

Bridge

City may delay replacing bridge

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SANTA CRUZ — The East Cliff Drive bridge replacement may indeed start this spring, to the consternation of residents and merchants in the surrounding area.

Then again, it may not.

Faced with continuing opposition from people living and working in the Seabright area, the City Council Tuesday once again allowed plans to begin the bridge replacement in April to stay on track, while voicing hope the project can somehow be delayed.

The old bridge has been scheduled for replacement for several years, but because of paperwork and funding delays, the starting date was pushed back to April. What that means, the merchants and residents say, is a terrible traffic jam as beach-area tourists flood the Seabright Avenue-Murray Street area, following a detour plan that will bypass the bridge.

But the city Public Works Department has said that delaying the replacement until September could cost the city money, since the project is already out to bid. A delay would mean the city would be on the hook for up to 5 percent of the cost of the project, Public Works

Director Larry Erwin said. The job will probably cost between \$700,000 and \$800,000, Erwin said. Most of the money is coming from the federal government.

Keith Cranmer, who owns the Seabright Brewery at Seabright Avenue and Murray Street, predicted that "traffic-crazed tourists" will be "running through residential neighborhoods" next summer. He also forecast the detour will have a "dramatic (negative) impact" on his business. He said the cost to the city of delaying the bridge replacement would be "insignificant" compared to the losses faced by merchants and the problems for residents from traffic.

Councilman John Laird said the city is clearly liable for any increased costs incurred by delaying the bridge replacement. Laird described the detour dilemma as "a mess."

The council did not delay the project. Instead, members directed Public Works to negotiate with the low bidder for the job and to return to the council with an estimate of how much it will cost to delay the bridge replacement. Council members could then, if they so chose, decide to order work to begin in September, instead of April.

The council had earlier also asked Erwin to

look into speeding up the project, which, it is estimated, will take 6 months.

But Erwin said that a city noise ordinance precludes work at night, and that paying overtime to workers putting in double shifts to speed up the job would also be too costly.

Erwin also said that the project should not be further delayed, since it has long since surpassed the 16-month deadline to begin that was a condition of the federal funding.

In addition, the city is worried that delaying the East Cliff job will just mean creating a much bigger headache. A delay could cause the East Cliff closure to overlap the scheduled 1990-91 closure of the Riverside Avenue bridge, leading into the Main Beach and Boardwalk area. The Riverside Avenue bridge detour has engendered its own volumes of neighborhood outrage.

The East Cliff bridge detour route will direct mid-county traffic coming into the city from Murray, north onto Seabright, west on Broadway and south on Ocean Street, which already is heavily congested in the summer tourist season. The detour plan also calls for alternate routes on Barson Street and south on Riverside, instead of Ocean.

Traffic leaving the beach area will reverse those directions.