

# More delays facing downtown bridge

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SANTA CRUZ — If you're bored with the military-compound look of the Soquel Avenue bridge, don't hold your breath waiting for a change in appearance.

City officials were hoping a \$350,000 to \$450,000 repair job would start this fall on the broken bridge, but a new snag involving a fish and game permit means the bridge probably won't be repaired until spring.

Two lanes of the bridge collapsed in fierce storms during the winter of 1982 and ever since the major city traffic link between downtown and the east side has assumed the look of a demilitarized zone, with high wire fences and heavy utility cables strung temporarily above the San

Lorenzo River. The fences mean poor visibility for drivers and pedestrians.

The fences, cables and closing of two traffic lanes were supposed to be temporary measures until the bridge was fixed, but have become more and more permanent. Months and years have passed with no repair work being started.

Now it appears three years will pass from the day the bridge broke with a thundering crash and the day workers begin reconstruction.

And the only ones seeming to enjoy the delay in the repair job are pigeons, who find the temporary cables a handy roosting spot, and some residents in the Soquel Avenue neighborhood who like the way the broken bridge has worked to reduce traffic on their streets, since many drivers now avoid the bridge.

The Federal Highway Administration is paying for the repair, but with the promise of funds has come a knot of project-delay-

Please see back of section

## Downtown bridge

Continued from Page A1

ing red tape. The delays are driving local officials nuts, because they are continually pestered by residents asking the same question: When is the bridge going to be fixed?

Late last month, city Public Works Director Larry Erwin said his staff finally received written authority from the state Department of Transportation (Caltrans) for the city to call for bids.

Getting to this stage was the culmination of a process that began in February 1982, when FHA and Caltrans teams officially recognized the fact the bridge had indeed collapsed.

Allowing for the time it takes for the City Council to award the contract, Erwin said it is "likely" the work could not begin until Oct. 1.

If that is true, the city would need special permission from the state Department of Fish and Game to work in the river.

Fish and Game rules say no work can be done in the river after Sept. 30 to protect the fishery.

And Erwin says the chances for the city to obtain special permission are slim.

"It is our experience that it is almost impossible to amend the permit to allow work after Sept. 30," said Erwin in a

report to the city manager.

Design plans by consultants Creegan and D'Angelo were forwarded by city staff to Caltrans in April, said Erwin.

In December 1983, Erwin had written a report to the city manager detailing the reasons for delays.

In that report, Erwin had lamented that, if construction were to start this summer, 30 months would have passed before the bridge was fixed.

Today, a 30-month delay looks good compared to the latest projection of a three-year wait.