

Bike path through greenbelt rejected

Bicycle Paths

Arana Gulch should remain open space, Santa Cruz council says

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SANTA CRUZ — The Broadway-Brommer bike path is dead.

The Santa Cruz City Council voted 4-3 Tuesday to abandon plans for a bike route linking Brommer Street and Broadway. The route, which has been under discussion since 1995, would have bridged 63-acre Arana Gulch and provided a crucial east-west link for cyclists

across an area above the Santa Cruz Small Craft Harbor.

But citing impacts of the path to one of the city's few remaining open spaces, Councilman Keith Sugar led the drive to kill the project in favor of a less intrusive one.

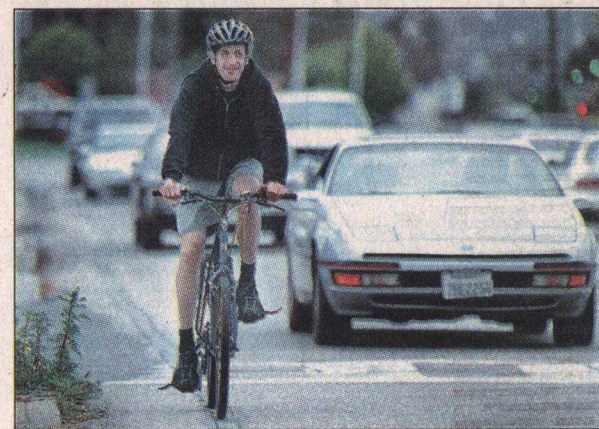
The final environmental impact report for the project wasn't finished, but Sugar concluded the route would pass too closely to sensitive habitat and wetlands, exposing the city to lawsuits.

"I don't need an EIR to tell me how to vote," he said.

The council directed staff to return with a report in September on bike routes on Soquel Drive, the Murray Street bridge over the harbor and along Frederick Street Park.

Previously, Sugar said the Frederick Street Park route made sense because it would be cheaper, less environmentally intrusive and offer handicapped access to the harbor.

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Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel

Live Oak resident Steve Hess uses Soquel Avenue on his daily bike commute to work in Santa Cruz.

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Bike path

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Patricia Matejcek, organizer of Friends of Arana Gulch, has been fighting to protect the area since 1992. She cheered the council's decision and called the bike path "absolutely incompatible" with environmental regulations and city land-use plans.

Preliminary environmental review of two routes across Arana Gulch showed they would have avoided some sensitive habitat, but one plan would have violated a city ordinance by coming within 100 feet of wetland habitat.

The city spent about six years studying the path and \$250,000 on the environmental report.

Councilman Scott Kennedy, who voted against the motion to abandon the route, said critics of the path were taking an overly narrow view.

"I think we are going to look back on tonight and say 'What were we thinking?'"

Bike commuter Ron Davis is already wondering.

"Here we are in this bike-friendly town, and there's no way to get across it," he said.

Davis rides his bike from Live Oak to his job as a physical plant supervisor at UC Santa Cruz. A committed cyclist, he takes his daughter to pre-school in a trailer attached to his bike. But Soquel Avenue's whizzing traffic and Murray Street's narrow road make the trip across town daunting. He said he's grown frustrated with the city's failure to act.

"It's so shortsighted," he said.

Micah Posner, co-founder of People Power, a Santa Cruz bicycle advocacy group, protecting open space while the surrounding area chokes in automobile traffic doesn't make sense, he said.

"The environmentalists understand preservation, but they don't understand sustainability," he said.

Posner said his group will hold the City Council to its commitment to build a bike route on Soquel Avenue or Frederick Street.



Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel

A cyclist enjoys a ride through an Arana Gulch meadow Wednesday afternoon. The Santa Cruz City Council rejected a plan for a paved bicycle commuter path through the Eastside greenbelt area.

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MICAH POSNER, CO-FOUNDER OF PEOPLE POWER

"We expect a bike lane within a year, and we're going to push for it," he said.

Not all cyclists supported the Brommer-Broadway route.

Mark Michel, co-owner of the Bicycle Trip, said the Broadway-Brommer path spawned too much controversy and is best put to rest. He said Soquel Avenue and Frederick Street make more sense.

Steve Hess, service manager at the Bicycle Trip, rides to work from his Seventh

Avenue home near Arana Gulch. He feared a paved trail over Arana Gulch would be "a foot in the door for future development."

Cheryl Schmitt, bicycle and pedestrian coordinator for the city's public works department, said the three alternatives the council directed staff to study are inferior to an Arana Gulch route.

To add bike lanes on Soquel Avenue would require removing parking, widening the road or eliminating one lane of traffic,

she said.

"We don't recommend it," she said.

The Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission received \$2 million for the bike path. That money will be available if Santa Cruz agrees on a bike route, but the commission can decide to allocate the money for other uses.

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