

BRIDGES

# U.S. help promised for bridge

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SANTA CRUZ — City officials asked Federal Transportation Secretary Samuel Skinner for help Tuesday in cutting red tape hampering demolition of the Riverside Avenue bridge.

Although he gave no promises, "he seemed sympathetic," Mayor Mardi Wormhoudt said.

The bridge crossing the San Lorenzo River into the Beach Flats was closed after the earthquake and must be demolished. But because the city was already planning to tear down and rebuild the bridge beginning next spring, the Federal Emergency Management Agency will not pay 100 percent of the cost. And, because of other earthquake costs and losses, the city cannot afford its 20-percent share.

"There is no way we could afford the local match," Wormhoudt said.

Skinner said after meeting with city officials that he wants "to make sure bureaucracy does not get in the way. I'm an expediter."

Skinner landed by helicopter in Santa Cruz for a brief visit while on the way to the San Francisco-Oakland area to inspect the Bay Bridge. Wormhoudt took the opportunity to show him the local bridge.

The low bridge has the potential to collect debris and dam the river in a storm and is 80 percent of the reason why the downtown is considered in a flood plain.

Skinner said he believes the transportation department "can be liberal in our interpretation of what we can do."



Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel

Federal Transportation Secretary Samuel Skinner, right, landed at UCSC.

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It will cost about \$560,000 to demolish the bridge, a two- to three-month project, according to Santa Cruz Public Works Director Larry Erwin. The local 20-percent share under pre-earthquake federal guidelines would amount to \$112,000, "a sizable amount," Erwin said. He said the city is prepared to begin the project as soon as Friday.

Regarding the Murray Street bridge over the Small Craft Harbor, Erwin said design work is under way. It could be three to six months before it is opened,

he said. The bridge rotated during the quake, pulling the roadbed from the pillars.

After viewing the Riverside Avenue bridge, Skinner met for about 45 minutes with local transportation officials and Watsonville Mayor Betty Murphy. He said despite "some glitches" he believes the federal and state governments are "working well together. Given the magnitude of the disaster, there is an awful lot going on," he said.