

Soquel Bridge Plans

State to okay project, after 2½ year delay

CALTRANS officials are expected to authorize final plans for long-delayed Soquel Bridge repairs this week, clearing the way for bids to be accepted and construction to start as early as September. The project has suffered 30 months of delays, largely due to federal red tape.

Final stages of the review — which hinge on city consultants accepting a revised spacing of bridge pilings — were expected to be completed sometime this week, said Caltrans engineer Willard Yep.

Half the bridge was washed away during the storms and flooding of January 1982, leaving only two narrow lanes to handle the busy traffic into downtown Santa Cruz during the past 2½ years. The single biggest factor in the delay has been that the city chose to go through the federal

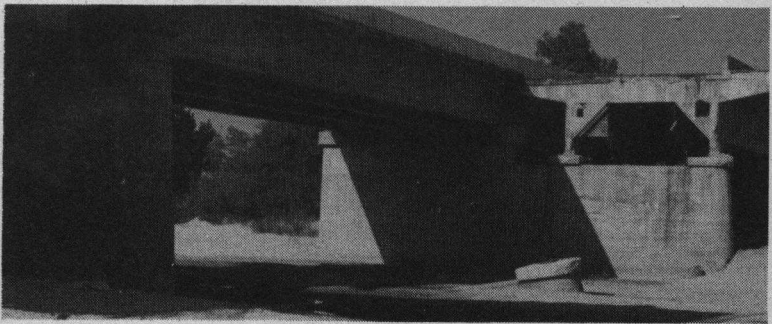
government (via Caltrans) to get the repairs completed. The lengthy federal process insures that the feds will pay 100 percent of the repair cost, estimated to be about \$450,000.

“Basically, if you’re going to accept (the federal government’s) money, you’re going to have to do things their way,” said Dick McKinney, the city’s chief public works engineer.

In the past 30 months, attempts were made to expedite the process, including numerous phone calls to Caltrans from city Public Works Director Larry Erwin and at least one letter from Mayor John Laird.

Caltrans’s Yep said repairs could have begun sooner had the repair consulting firm, Creegan and D’Angelo, prepared its repair proposals better. Yep specifically

(continued next page)



Soquel Bridge

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(continued from page 5)

pointed to a soil study the firm didn’t enclose with one of the proposals.

But Erwin, in a report to the City Council last December, said that a 1972 soil study would have been sufficient because the composition of the San Lorenzo Riverbed had not changed over the past 12 years. The city complied with the request, however, and sent an updated soil study to Caltrans last winter. The study apparently never reached its destina-

tion, adding almost a month’s delay to the already-long trail of bureaucracy.

After the city puts the repair job to bid, which could happen this month, the choice of construction company will still be subject to Caltrans approval.

If all goes smoothly, Yep predicts construction could begin before September. But Erwin warned the City Council in April that if construction is held up until November, due to more snags, winter rains would delay the project until the San Lorenzo riverbed dries next spring. •