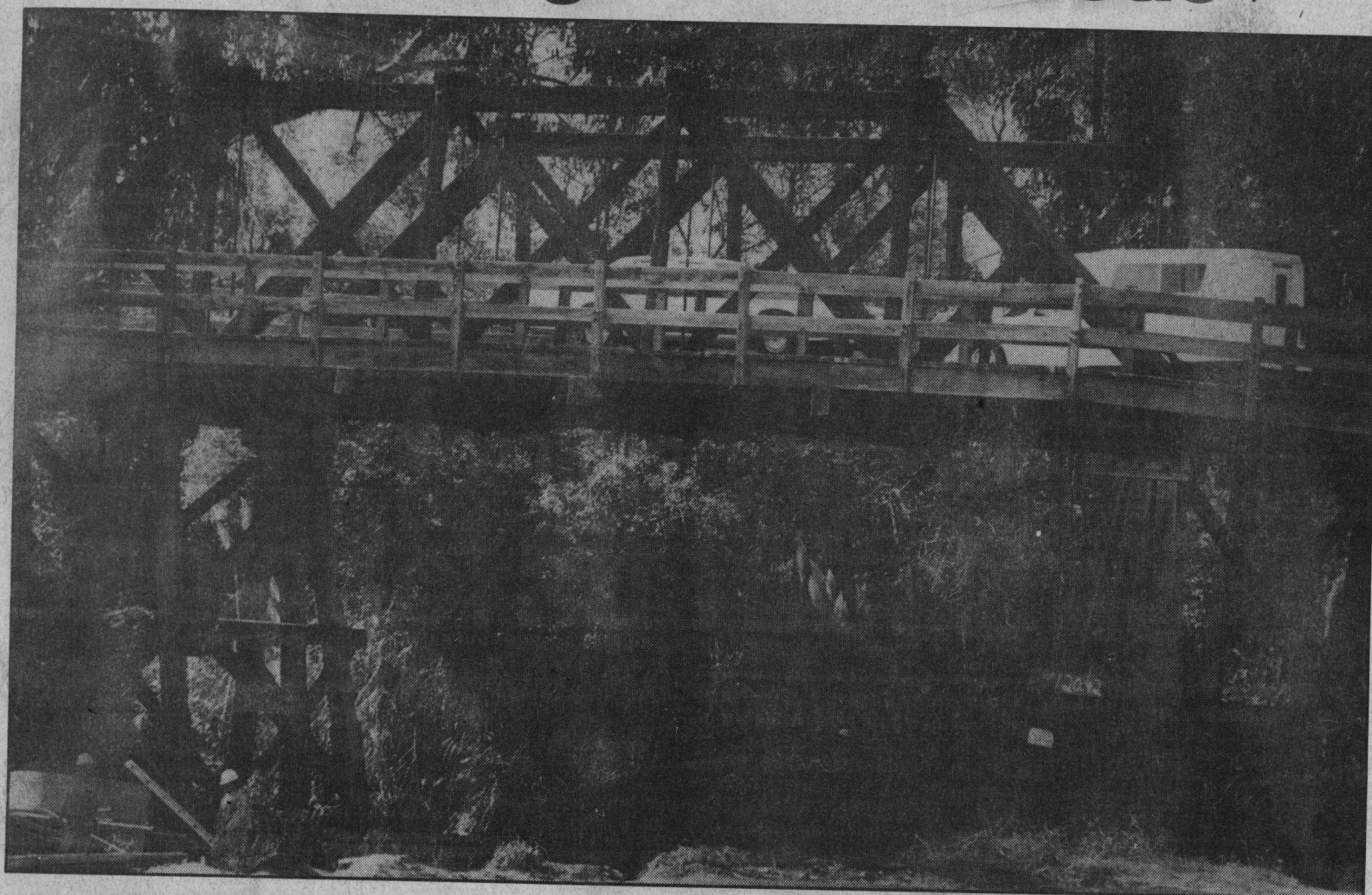


BRIDGES Time running out for trestle 11-15-91



Public hearings will be held before the City Council makes a final decision on the beach-area wooden bridge. Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel

City ready to replace wooden bridge

By KAREN CLARK
Sentinel staff writer

SANTA CRUZ — Replacing the weary West Cliff Drive bridge, first proposed when federal money became available in mid-1987, is back on the front burner of city projects.

City Council members this week formed a committee to help draft a preliminary design of a new \$1 million concrete bridge.

The council also approved sending the initial environmental paperwork to Caltrans and the Federal Highway Administration, which is paying for the work.

The historic wooden bridge, which con-

nects the beach area with West Cliff Drive, was built over the Southern Pacific Railroad line in 1918.

It is listed in the Historic Highway Bridges of California as an example of the only truss of its kind in the state. It also is eligible for the National Historic Register.

The wooden bridge, however, is "structurally deficient," said Chris Schneider, assistant director of Public Works. "The difficulty with wooden bridges is they're very hard to rehabilitate — to the point of being impossible."

Councilwoman Katherine Beiers, however, has been critical of lack of public involve-

ment in the process toward replacing a historic structure.

"This is one of, if not the most, significant bridges in Santa Cruz (that's) coming down, and it should get at least some kind of public hearing," said Beiers, noting that even putting in a stop sign requires a public hearing.

"The disappointment for me is that although they (Public Works) are technically not required to have a meeting, that they didn't see this was good government."

On Tuesday, council members anxious to keep the project on track grudgingly agreed

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Bridge

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with Beiers to require bridge committee members to conduct a public hearing on their work.

"At this point, the momentum is clear we're likely to take the bridge down," said Councilman Don Lane. "I don't think we should have a charade if that's what we're intending to do."

But Beiers was adamant, saying there has been "no public announcement that the bridge is in danger" of being replaced.

Actually, the issue has been discussed in previous public meetings, including the council's budget hearings this year and last, as well as the Historic Preservation Commission.

But Beiers said few members of the public attend budget hearings, and the Historic Preservation Commission didn't have all the paperwork available when it last discussed the issue.

"I think you've got people who have to get a job done, and this is how they can expedite their project," said Beiers about the Public Works Department.

She said that in May 1990, she had asked staff to find out if the \$1 million in federal bridge replacement funds could be used for restoring historic bridges.

The meeting with state officials finally was held in this year, after Beiers repeated her request at a council meeting in September.

The result, she said, was a decision that the funds could not be

used to restore West Cliff Drive bridge.

Schneider said at the council meeting this week that he also had found no other funding sources that would allow the city to restore rather than rebuild.

He said that the problem in rehabilitating the bridge is that it would have to be brought up to current standards, "which on a wooden bridge is impossible."

There also is no money to maintain the aging bridge, he said.

Options that must be considered when dealing with a historic structure include finding a group to take the bridge for private use, or incorporating unique parts of the old bridge to make the new one look better.

If final approval is granted to replace the bridge, the new one would be wider, sturdier and would include pedestrian lanes.

Public Works officials originally had expected to use the federal money earmarked in 1987 to replace East Cliff Drive bridge, the Riverside Avenue bridge and the West Cliff bridge.

The East Cliff bridge was finished in 1990, and the Riverside bridge (which got federal money because it was damaged in the earthquake) was completed this year.

The Oct. 17, 1989, earthquake delayed work on the West Cliff Drive bridge because of the urgency of repairing the Riverside span, said officials.