

SC council to vote on changing bike route

Bicycle Paths 1-11-11
Redesignation would nudge
visiting cyclists off Mission
to West Cliff Drive

By J.M. BROWN

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SANTA CRUZ
CITY
COUNCIL

WHEN: General sessions at 3 p.m. and 7 p.m. today, 5:30 p.m. public comment period for items not on the agenda

WHERE: Council Chamber, 809 Center St.

ISSUES: Redesignating Pacific Coast Bike Route through Santa Cruz, setting fees for the city's rental inspection ordinance and creating variable parking fees for use with a pay-by-phone program.

SANTA CRUZ — The City Council is expected to vote today on whether to support moving the official Pacific Coast Bike Route off traffic-choked Mission Street and on to picturesque West Cliff Drive.

Transportation officials have sought to move the route, which is part of an 1,800-mile stretch from British Columbia to Southern California, to share West Cliff's unparalleled view of Monterey Bay with visiting riders and reduce their risk of collisions with vehicles. Since 2007, two bicyclists have been killed after being struck on Mission Street, which has no bike lanes, and police have recorded three other crashes there since 2009.

The Regional Transportation Commission, which approached Caltrans and the city of Santa Cruz

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about making the change as part of a project by national cycling groups to identify biking routes, hopes the move will encourage touring cyclists and locals alike to avoid Mission Street. Caltrans told the city it wanted to see a resolution from the City Council before proceeding.

However, the city will have to cover the cost of replacing signs carrying the official Pacific Coast Bike Path designation, which cost about \$100 each. An estimated 40 signs will have to be replaced, and the funds will be drawn from state transportation dollars allocated to the city.

Highway 1 is named Mission Street for the 1.5 miles that it cuts through the heart of the Westside, from Swift Street to Chestnut Street, and contains restaurants, grocery stores and hotels. The current Pacific Coast Bike Route, which

follows Highway 1 to Laurel Street and then to Broadway, was placed on Mission Street to give cyclists access to services after a long haul from the North Coast.

But the recommended route change — which takes several city streets leading to West Cliff Drive and up Front Street to Laurel Street — will deliver riders to the same downtown intersection as the original route.

"In this day of cell phones and smart phones, you can find services," said Cheryl Schmitt, the city's transportation coordinator. "And it makes more sense to keep the bike route along the coast."

Frequent cyclist Sandino Gomez, who works at the Resource Center for Nonviolence, said the route's redesignation is a smart and safe move. He said many cyclists use Delaware Avenue and King Street as alternatives to Mission Street.

"In terms of visitors, it's a great idea because I'd much rather show someone new

to our town West Cliff Drive than Mission," he said. "This whole thing would be moot if when they widened Mission, they would have included bike lanes."

Officials determined there wasn't enough room to add bike lanes during a state roadwidening project on Mission Street a decade ago. Since then, cyclists have been fighting for bike safety improvements on King Street and elsewhere as an alternative to Mission Street.

West Cliff Drive doesn't have a bike lane on the street but does offer a multi-use path, similar to a wide sidewalk, that contains a bike lane. Besides the view of Monterey Bay, West Cliff Drive is ideal for cyclists because it has "low vehicle volume and people drive at a fairly relaxed speed," said Cory Caletti, senior transportation planner and bicycle planning program manager for the county Regional Transportation Commission.

"The Pacific Coast Bike

Route is heavily promoted to people visiting our county," Caletti said. "West Cliff Drive is such a scenic jewel."

Also today, the City Council will vote on a fee schedule for the rental inspection ordinance passed last year. The city plans to charge property owners \$45 annually to register rental property and \$20 for self-certification. If a property doesn't qualify for self-check because of previous problems, the city will charge \$20 to inspect each property annually and \$107 for follow-up inspections.

A Santa Cruz property owner has sued to reverse the law, which was made in response to thousands of suspected illegal rental units.

The council also will vote on establishing variable rates for parking meters and pay spaces. Motorists would be allowed to stay parked longer in time-restricted meters or pay spots by offering a premium rate — up to \$6 per hour in some beach areas — by using a cell phone pay service.