

Take a 'roundabout' way to the beach

Santa Cruz OKs traffic circles near wharf, Depot Park

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SANTA CRUZ — City leaders chose 'roundabouts' over traffic signals to streamline two busy beach-area intersections leading to the wharf and Depot Park.

The City Council's unanimous approval Tuesday to build roundabouts at Pacific Avenue and Beach Street, and at Pacific Avenue and Center Street, allows the city Public Works Department to move forward on the estimated \$550,000 project.

"I've been a secret fan of roundabouts for many years though I haven't told anybody," Councilman Ed Porter said. "I've waited 30 years to see a recommendation

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COUNCILMAN ED PORTER

for a roundabout in Santa Cruz."

Roundabouts — used frequently outside the U.S. and growing in popularity nationwide — are circular road patterns that control traffic; cars enter and exit at low speeds and move in one direction, never coming to a complete stop.

The city paid roundabout engineer Scott Ritchie of Truckee

\$75,000 in July to study the intersections to determine how they could handle more traffic, better accommodate walkers and bicyclists and improve safety. On Tuesday, Ritchie strongly recommended the roundabouts.

Improving the intersections with either traffic signals or roundabouts was proposed in the so-called Beach South of Laurel Plan adopted by the council in 1998.

Chris Schneider of Public Works

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said Tuesday that replacing stop signs at those intersections is critical as the area is poised for several tourist-related projects, including the Museum of Natural History relocating from East Cliff Drive to Depot Park and the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary visitors center planned for the current site of the Fun Spot skatepark. Also, the owners of the apartment complex La Bahia propose building an upscale hotel on the beachfront property on Beach Street.

"We need to move this forward or we'll be behind the curve," Schneider told the council. "We think roundabouts are the only solution for the wharf intersection. We don't really think a signal will work."

The roundabouts will be paid for with traffic impact fees paid by new development projects coming to the area, and grants. Funding for designing the roundabouts will be included in the city's 2007 capital improvement program.

The Public Works Department will work with Ritchie, the roundabout engineer, during the next year to finalize the design. The council must approve a final design before construction begins, which is at least two or three years away, city leaders said.

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