

Consultant Proposes Circulation System ²⁻⁴⁻⁵

Recommendation for making Pacific avenue and Front street one-way streets "as soon as practicable and certainly in preparation for the next summer season," was put forward yesterday by Harold B. Wise, Menlo Park traffic consultant.

The plan for "an inner loop to take care of traffic circulation in the downtown area," with beach-bound vehicles traveling Pacific avenue and Front street traffic limited to cars headed away from the beach, was well received at a luncheon session of the citizens' advisory committee on off-street parking and the Santa Cruz chamber of commerce parking committee.

Basis for the "preliminary circulation plan" is the use of the street system at the present time, related to the land use pattern, Wise said, reviewing surveys to date.

Traffic and parking counts, Wise reported, showed downtown traffic at peak hours was 1.7 times as great during the last Labor day holiday as it was during the Christmas shopping peak period. The biggest load recorded in the series of counts at both periods was the Saturday of Labor day weekend, he said.

The city's major traffic problem, he asserted, is getting people to and from the beach area without destroying the center of town as a place to do business.

The problem will continue to grow, Wise pointed out, as population and the number of vehicles on the streets and highways increase. He estimated that in the period from 1951 to 1970 the number of cars registered in the state will go up 90 per cent.

Population in the five counties of this area, which contribute the biggest traffic flow here, has been growing faster than that of the state as a whole, the consultant said, expressing belief the population of these five counties will increase another 120 per cent in the same 19-year period.

These estimates indicate that the traffic load we have in Santa Cruz today will be doubled in 1970, Wise explained.

Graphs based on last year's survey here and state-compiled information show the Soquel avenue bridge, the highway coming into town, and Pacific avenue are carrying far beyond their "practical working capacities" now, the expert said, pointing out that capacity of any thoroughfare is limited by its narrowest point.

It is not economical to widen narrow sections of Pacific avenue by "knocking all the buildings down on one side," he added.

As a solution, he said, "We seriously propose an inner loop to take care of circulation in the downtown area and an outer loop to take care of circulation to and from the beach."

If the city follows Wise's "firm recommendation" for making Pacific and Front one-way streets to take care of downtown circulation, he added, it will mean the same number of cars using Front as Pacific.

One ramification, should the plan go into effect, is that it might make Front street properties more valuable than they are at present, he remarked.

The inner loop plan also might make the problem of developing off-street parking "on the fringe of the loop" easier, Wise said, stressing that it is essential to nail down the matter of circulation before settling on a parking plan.

Projected state highway development, joining the freeway onto Mission street, may provide the answer to need for an "outer circulation loop" permitting traffic to bypass the main downtown streets on the way to the beach area, Wise continued.

The freeway job will "save you from having to build a new Soquel avenue bridge," he opined, estimating it will reduce the use of the bridge by a third.

He emphasized need of immediate action to increase traffic capacity in the downtown area in the absence of by-pass for out-of-town, beach-bound vehicles. "The freeway is going to help a great deal, but it won't be built for the coming summer season," the consultant pointed out.

City Manager Robert Klein cited two immediate benefits, should the preliminary circulation plan be adopted. The one-way downtown loop, he said, would eliminate the island on Pacific at the Soquel intersection and also provide for better traffic control at the Plaza.

All the side streets intersecting the main arteries, as well as Center street, would remain two-way by the plan, Klein added, and motorists would be able to make a left or right turn at every intersection off Pacific and Front.

In answer to a question by Hyman Abrams, Klein assured the group parking on both sides of Pacific avenue would continue under the plan.

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street merchants went to their city council and insisted that their street be made one-way, too.

Merchants cannot look on a driver as a prospective purchaser until he gets on the sidewalk, Sidney Carter, chairman of the city council-appointed off-street parking committee, pointed out.

Wise expressed certainty the program he proposed would tend to maintain the volume of foot traffic downtown.

"I came to this meeting with apprehension," Earl Harris admitted, "but I like this system very much." Harris brought out the fact the plan would eliminate all the bus stops on one side of the avenue, which would be another factor in increasing its parking capacity and making flow of traffic easier.

Wise said that, with the preliminary circulation plan's adoption, a traffic signal system at the Plaza would be possible. Under present conditions, he added, a signal system there would be out of the question because traffic is going in so many directions from the crossing.

The crowd attending the joint committee session appeared enthusiastic about the plan. Asked the procedure for instituting the downtown loop system, Klein said it was up to the citizen's advisory committee to recommend action to the city council, if members decide in its favor.

Cost of putting the plan into effect would be comparatively inexpensive, the city manager said, listing adjustment of meters, repainting lanes and removal of the Soquel avenue island on Pacific as the principal items which would be required.

Even without the summer crowd, Santa Cruz traffic flow presents an immediate, urgent problem, Carter pointed out.

Other specific recommendations for solving circulation and parking problems are forthcoming soon, by the schedule for completion of his studies for the city Wise gave at yesterday's luncheon session in the Riverside hotel.

The preliminary circulation plan presented yesterday will be followed on March 3 by a final circulation plan, parking needs analysis and preliminary off-street parking plan.

Presentation of a final off-street parking plan is slated for April 7. Wise said he will be prepared to list priorities and costs for his recommendations for circulation and off-street parking on May 5, finishing the work he contracted to do for the city last fall.

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Asked by Mayor Cliff L. Dysle if he knew of any adverse effects on business districts with institution of one-way street systems in other cities, Wise said he knew of none.

The consultant cited J street merchants in Sacramento who, when a similar plan first was presented there, resisted a proposal to make J street one-way. Later, after other downtown Sacramento streets were made one-way to increase their flow of traffic, Wise said, J