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SV toll road hits dead end

8-11-95

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SANTA CRUZ — Scotts Valley Mayor Michael Shulman's suggestion that a toll booth could help pay for repairs to Mount Hermon Road has died a quick death.

Local jurisdictions need permission from the state Legislature to create a toll road, and Shulman said Wednesday he is not interested in pursuing the idea that far.

"That was never really the focus," said Shulman, who suggested the toll-booth idea at the City Council meeting last week. "The focus was trying to recover the funds to repair the road."

At issue is how the city will pay for approximately \$437,000 in repairs to Mount Hermon Road, which is the second-busiest thoroughfare in Santa Cruz County after Capitola's 41st Avenue. Hundreds of sand trucks and some 35,000 commuters travel on the road each day.

The city has about \$187,000 left in an assessment fund created 10 years ago when Mount Hermon Road area property owners paid to rebuild the street. That leaves them about \$250,000 short.

Shulman thought toll booths might generate revenue, but even more serious consideration will be given to establishing a vehicle-weight restriction for Mount Hermon Road to limit future repair needs. The City Council will consider that idea Sept. 6.

But money for immediate re-

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— Mayor Michael Shulman

pairs still is an issue, and the city has asked the Kaiser Sand and Gravel Co. to contribute.

Officials say sand trucks are creating the problem rather than other kinds of heavy vehicles since the road is deteriorating only on the side heading toward Highway 17 from the quarries. Sand trucks on that side run fully loaded as they head over the hill, and are empty when they return on the other side of the road.

The city targeted Kaiser rather than the other three sand quarries whose trucks use Mount Hermon Road (Lone Star, Quail Hollow and Felton) because Kaiser's operating permit is up for its five-year review by the county.

But Shulman got a cool reception by the county Planning Commission Wednesday when he suggested Kaiser be required to pay for the repairs as a condition for keeping its operating permit.

Shulman said Kaiser could pay the full \$250,000 still needed to repair and fortify the road immediately. Then, when the other quarries are reviewed by the county, they could be forced to pay their share by reimbursing Kaiser.

Kaiser has offered to pay

\$150,000 as its share, but it has balked at footing the bill for the other quarries — even temporarily.

Shulman suggested that if the quarries refuse to come up with the money to repair the damage, the city could ban sand trucks from Mount Hermon Road by creating a weight limit, or set up a permit system where overweight trucks must pay a fee for the right to use the road.

"I'm a little concerned with your suggestion we have Kaiser foot the whole bill and then try to collect from the other quarries," said Planning Commissioner Robert Bremner. "I think it's appropriate that something be done, but ... I think this is a little heavy-handed."

Planning Commissioner James Hamlin suggested that the city ask the other quarries to join Kaiser in voluntarily helping pay for repairs before expecting the county to consider requiring it.

"To ask the commission to impose a future regulation on another operation is a very difficult thing to achieve."

The commission continued the Kaiser permit hearing until Sept. 13.