

Mission: Pedestrian

An organization of neighbors and business people seeking to improve the pedestrian environment in Santa Cruz
1603 King Street, Santa Cruz, CA 95060 www.missionped.org

July 10, 2014

Matt Fowler
50 Higuera Street
San Luis Obispo, CA 93401

RE: Route 1/9 Intersection Improvement Project in Santa Cruz

Dear Mr. Fowler,

We are appalled that the proposed changes to the Route 1/9 Intersection in Santa Cruz would *decrease* safety and walkability for pedestrians, in direct conflict with the Complete Streets policy.

In addition the proposed changes violate the goals pertaining to pedestrian travel of the City General Plan and the Master Transportation Study. The proposed project is even more grievous since it does not significantly improve the situation for motorists by providing a second entrance/exit to the Harvey West area.

1. Caltrans' Complete Streets Policy and Federal Law require safe accommodation for all users. The Initial Study does not seem to take pedestrian travel seriously.

"The Department views all transportation improvements as opportunities to improve safety, access, and mobility for all travelers in California and recognizes bicycle, pedestrian, and transit modes as integral elements of the transportation system."

—Deputy Directive 64-R1, 2008

- This proposed project does not take walking seriously as a form of transportation. Indeed the Initial Study describes both walking and biking as “recreational” with the unspoken assumption that such users could recreate elsewhere. The report shows no understanding that pedestrians may be traveling on foot to a *destination* on the other side of the intersection or to a *destination* that requires them to walk along River Street.
- No pedestrian counts were contained in the report. Casual observation of this intersection shows pedestrians crossing frequently. The Page Smith House and Santa Cruz Homeless Services Center generate many pedestrian trips across the intersection. Even Google street views of this intersection show pedestrians!
- The added lanes on the two legs with the marked crosswalks would increase the distance that pedestrians would have to travel to cross the intersection. It was not clear from the Initial Study exactly how much that increased distance would be. Preparers apparently did not deem it important enough to compare the present width of the pedestrian crossing with the “improved” i.e. *increased* distance of the pedestrian crossing.
- Even the tiny pork chop island on Route 1 which acts as a pedestrian refuge would be removed. Vehicles turning right at this intersection would get the green light to turn at the same time the pedestrian would get the walk signal to cross River Street. To make pedestrians more visible to drivers, they should be given a **Leading Pedestrian Interval** to begin crossing River Street before drivers get a green light. Additionally, there should be increased enforcement of California law which requires drivers to STOP on the red light before turning right. Currently most drivers do not stop, and indeed are looking left for oncoming vehicles instead of looking right to see pedestrians crossing the street.
- Increased crossing distances expose pedestrians to motor vehicle traffic for longer periods of time and are more

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dangerous for pedestrians.

2. The 8-foot sidewalk and 5-foot tree-planted landscape strip along both sides of River Street would be narrowed to a 5-foot sidewalk with no landscape strip.

- Existing street trees would be cut down and converted to a traffic lane. A tree-lined landscape strip increases pedestrian safety and comfort and buffers pedestrians from the motor vehicles.
- The decorative pedestrian-scale streetlights would be removed, decreasing safety for pedestrians.
- The landscaping in front of the Page Smith House would be removed. This greenery and the landscape strips on River Street make walking along Route 9 more bearable for pedestrians.

3. The project is in conflict with the Santa Cruz City General Plan

- The project does not deal with the problem of only one entrance/exit to Harvey West area. Goal M3, Action M3.1.1.13 of the General Plan calls for improved access to and from the Harvey West area.
- Policy M3.2 is to improve the condition, safety and efficiency of the Route 1/9 intersection for motorists as well as for pedestrians and bicyclists. This proposed project does not improve the intersection for pedestrians: It removes landscape strips, narrows sidewalks, and increases crossing distances.

4. The conceptual design of the project does not employ best practices for pedestrian safety.

- The median islands are not shown to have “noses” on the intersection side of the marked crosswalks. Such islands shield pedestrians from motor vehicles.

5. The Initial Study states that the San Lorenzo Multipurpose Path is now considered the primary north/south route for pedestrians and bicyclists.

- This path does not work for pedestrians whose origin or destination is the Homeless Services Center since such a route adds considerable distance to such a trip.
- Walkers taking the path under Route 1 must pass transient encampments and questionable characters even during the daytime. On July 6 on a trip to the area, this writer observed two groups of people with packs in the riparian area on the north side of the bridge and one man with alcohol riding north on a bicycle.
- The lighting under Route 1 is minimal and poorly maintained. Below is a photo of the dirt and spider-web encrusted light observed on July 6, 2014. There are only two such lights, one on either side of the underpass.



Many people, including this writer, do not feel comfortable and safe walking on this path under Route 1 after dark. The adjoining portion of the San Lorenzo River Walk is closed at sunset.

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6. A better solution

There is, however, a better solution to the traffic congestion that will also be better for pedestrians and bicyclists crossing the 1/9 Intersection. That is, create another intersection north of the intersection between the RR tracks and Chestnut Street. Such a project would also provide another entrance and exit to Harvey West.

I have been told that Caltrans rejected a second entrance/exit north of the RR tracks because they envisioned the new intersection as a ramp. Caltrans was rightly concerned about the increased collision rate such a ramp could entail.

However, a *signalized intersection* would not have the high collision rate of a ramp. Construction of another road leading to Harvey West would not only relieve congestion in the short term, but would also enable drivers coming from or going to the westside of Santa Cruz to avoid the 1/9 intersection altogether.

Route 1 heading north to Chestnut Street is not a high speed freeway, but rapidly becomes a business district at the traffic signal at Chestnut. Properly timed, the two intersections could work together to decrease the delay currently experienced by drivers at the 1/9 intersection.

A benefit of the new road would be a safer River Street and 1/9 intersection for pedestrians and bicyclists as well as a much-needed second entrance/exit to the Harvey West area.

In the past a number of accidents and incidents have blocked the single entrance/exit to the Harvey West area. Residents have been trapped in the area for hours, unable to go home. A second entrance/exit should be a higher priority than the proposed project which just perpetuates the current situation.

Thank you for considering these comments,



Debbie Bulger, *for* Mission: Pedestrian