

## **Transportation Report**

### ***Synopsis***

Present and future transportation problems in the City of Santa Cruz are the focus of this report. It examines them as reflected by three items: the City of Santa Cruz Master Transportation Study, the City of Santa Cruz and the Santa Cruz Metropolitan Transit District. Indications of the importance of transportation as a subject are the many agencies, commissions, associations and independent groups continuously studying the subject. Results of these studies frequently reach different conclusions on the best approach to be taken. This report recommends that the City of Santa Cruz take a more aggressive approach to solving its traffic problems.

### ***Background***

Transportation is defined as the movement of materials or people from one location to another. Therefore, transportation includes the simplest form, walking, through using the largest transportation vehicles. Everyone and everything must move from one place to another, and transportation touches all of our lives. It is an important subject.

Many agencies, commissions, associations and independent groups continuously study transportation ideas. Examples include a mid-1980s study of the potential of a Personal Transit System, an elevated ski gondola-type proposed by Sky Web Express, a Minnesota-based group. A 1992 study conducted in Santa Cruz estimated High Street traffic flow would decrease by 47% if an eastern access were realized.

The 1990-1991 Santa Cruz County Grand Jury included in its final report a review of the existing traffic conditions in the county. The jury's conclusions included:

1. The automobile is the predominant mode of travel.
2. Traffic will continue to increase.
3. Advanced planning and traffic management should be pursued.
4. Alternative forms of mass transit and carpooling need to be encouraged.

The 2002-2003 Santa Cruz County Grand Jury included in its final report an extensive, broad review of the options to improve transportation in Santa Cruz County and provided an in-depth investigation covering seven individual topics. Responses to the Grand Jury's conclusions and recommendations in a final report from the involved authorities were generally positive and did include a few rejections of proposals. The availability of time and money were caveats to implementation.

## **Introduction**

This transportation report from the 2003-2004 Santa Cruz County Grand Jury will be more narrowly focused, concentrating on the City of Santa Cruz. Little has changed since the 1990-91 report was issued in that the automobile continues to be the predominant mode of travel in Santa Cruz today. The Master Transportation Study points to a pattern of continued traffic growth. Those predictions that traffic will continue to increase are certainly the case today. Population has increased and the University of California at Santa Cruz headcount continues to go up and with that, traffic congestion and parking problems are projected to escalate.

Innumerable editorials and stories in the Santa Cruz Sentinel newspaper, as well as many letters to the editor, speak to the concerns of the public.<sup>1</sup> The citizens of the City of Santa Cruz have a reputation for being involved in “the process” whenever important subjects and controversial decisions must be made by city government.<sup>2</sup>

## **Scope**

The Grand Jury focused its investigation on the following pieces of the transportation puzzle:

1. The City of Santa Cruz Master Transportation Study (MTS).
2. City of Santa Cruz governing bodies.
3. Santa Cruz Metropolitan Transit District (METRO).

## **Sources**

Interviewed:

Transportation officials.

Attended:

December 9, 2003 Santa Cruz City Council Meeting with public comments offered by the Council members during the presentation of the city’s Master Transportation Study.

Reviewed:

Fukuji Planning & Design and in association with five sub-consultant organizations, City of Santa Cruz Master Transportation Study Final Report.

Santa Cruz Sentinel articles.

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<sup>1</sup> Santa Cruz Sentinel.

<sup>2</sup> Santa Cruz Sentinel, 21 December 2003.

## ***The City of Santa Cruz Master Transportation Study (MTS)***

The Master Transportation Study (MTS) is a 284-page document that took input from its Steering Committee, Technical Advisory Committee, Conference Committee and study staff. Public forums and events provided community representation. This Grand Jury report will excerpt selected points in this review. Interested individuals are encouraged to read the entire study.

The MTS mission statement offers to “Create a Transportation Plan for the City of Santa Cruz that is inspiring, innovative and implemental with broad-based community support.”<sup>3</sup>

On September 22, 1999, the Mayor of Santa Cruz and the Chancellor of the University of California Santa Cruz signed a document agreeing to jointly fund a community-based approach to planning the city’s transportation future. The MTS is the final document. Among the main objectives of the MTS is an effort to expand and offer new travel choices for people who live, work, play and visit in Santa Cruz. An additional objective is to relieve citywide vehicle traffic congestion.

As for future growth, the report looks ahead to 2020 and states “if there is no change in travel behavior from today, forecasts indicate an increase of 19% for vehicle miles of travel during the PM peak hour. Vehicle hours of delay are projected to increase 92%.”<sup>4</sup>

The study recommends and discusses 12 strategic initiatives. A recurring theme throughout the study takes three parts:

1. Reduce single occupancy ridership by encouraging car pools or ride sharing.
2. Increase walking and bicycling to move around the city.
3. Bus use must increase from the current usage, 3.8% to 8.6%, to a 125% increase by 2020 to achieve no further growth in vehicle traffic.

With regard to the Santa Cruz Metro, the MTS observes that the greater the transit investment, the higher the density of ridership required to justify the investment.

The MTS presents a vision for traffic management: “Automobile congestion will be managed and reduced while minimizing impacts on surrounding residential neighborhoods. New technologies in transportation will be evaluated and adopted as they are shown to be affordable and implementable.”<sup>5</sup>

The steering committee for the MTS adopted 12 key points. It noted that the MTS is an innovative, community-based approach to create a safe, sustainable transportation future

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<sup>3</sup> City of Santa Cruz Master Transportation Study, page 5.

<sup>4</sup> City of Santa Cruz Master Transportation Study, page 6.

<sup>5</sup> City of Santa Cruz Master Transportation Study, page 121.

for the City of Santa Cruz that expands travel choices, relieves traffic congestion and enhances community livability. Key point number eight says in part that “the MTS process needs to create reasonable expectations for future conditions. If the MTS measures prove successful, then Vehicle Hours of Delay (VHD) in 2020 will only be approximately 15% worse than today. However, if current trends continue over the next two decades, Vehicle Hours of Delay is projected to increase 92%.”<sup>6</sup>

UCSC generates the largest amount of traffic within the city. One and a half pages of the MTS’s 284 pages are devoted to the impact of UCSC on traffic activity.

A point made in this section is that “a high-occupancy passenger connection from UCSC to regional transit via a new access method needs to be evaluated as a potentially more efficient and effective route to reduce Westside traffic impact and serve local and regional UCSC travel markets.”<sup>7</sup> The original agreement for establishing the MTS set forth that the study “will not include a discussion or consideration of an eastern access as part of any combination of solutions to traffic issues in the City’s next update of the Transportation element of the City’s General Plan, but should include discussion of other possible alternative access routes for the future.”<sup>8</sup>

### **City of Santa Cruz**

City officials say the City of Santa Cruz has very few available options for reducing traffic and parking problems. Neighborhoods are established, streets are laid out, traffic patterns are set and money is limited. Add in the projected increases in the general population as well as a larger presence of UCSC and some officials can see a strain being placed on the of established “no growth” philosophy.

During the Santa Cruz City Council meeting of December 9, 2003, the city’s Master Transportation Study (MTS) was discussed. Extensive public comment was followed by remarks and observations by the City Council members. Council members made several points:

- The MTS should be seen as a framework at best.
- A Personal Rapid Transit (PRT) system is possible with our single, high-use destination point.
- City Transportation Commission (CTC) must be charged: what can be done to solve the problems of Westside congestion?
- We have more traffic growth than people growth. Why?
- Previous traffic studies and plans have failed with their delusional objectives. Government can’t force people to change.
- The City wants growth but can’t/won’t provide for it.
- We need the political will to do something about congestion.

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<sup>6</sup> City of Santa Cruz Master Transportation Study, page 250.

<sup>7</sup> City of Santa Cruz Master Transportation Study, page 280.

<sup>8</sup> City of Santa Cruz Master Transportation Study, page 282.

- UCSC is point B, but point A is not defined.
- We can't say, "Don't think about the eastern access." Put some engineers on it, even PRT (Personal Rapid Transit). What is in the future?
- Consensus is to deal with future growth now. We need to analyze traffic patterns.
- UCSC has done more than any other employer to relieve traffic and single occupancy vehicles (personal occupancy vehicles or POV), but must do more. It is an ever-growing problem.
- The diversion of the eastern access is a smokescreen. All concerned must look at the whole problem.
- The city must provide leadership to generate relief.
- We need to carry over for more discussion after accepting the MTS. We charge the City Transportation Commission to develop specific plans.
- We must analyze the percentage goals of the MTS. What are the specifics of the plan to attain the goals?
- We must address solutions and costs, then establish a time frame.
- Note that the Regional Transportation Commission will cooperate.
- We suggest staff review all the above and come back with the best approach as to who should solve the problems.

The city's MTS was accepted by the City Council. Staff was directed to prepare a program and schedule future direction.

A separate motion was made and accepted saying that the Santa Cruz City Council will not entertain the idea of any road through Pogonip.

While the MTS is designed for the entire City of Santa Cruz and UCSC, very little discussion was devoted during the City Council acceptance to anything other than the traffic growth impact on the Westside and the need to solve those problems now.

The MTS, having been accepted, is seen as a guide for the future. The City Council will look to the Public Works Department for priorities, engineering considerations, grant seeking and general guidance. The City Transportation Commission seeks the same support from Public Works. When preparing grant requests for funds to enact projects suggested in the MTS, the Public Works Department will seek the help of the Regional Transportation Commission. One significant advantage of having the MTS approved and in place is that when and if grant money becomes available, Santa Cruz has its plans ready to go. All major projects are in a holding pattern for now. The city in general and Public Works in particular must set priorities based on anticipated and then attainable grant monies. All really significant projects are years away. For now, the city is limited to relatively inexpensive "adjustments" to the existing infrastructure such as timing on signal lights. Even previously planned pavement projects are on hold.

At its January 20, 2004 meeting, the Santa Cruz City Council adopted a prioritized project list of roadway modifications and signal changes for inclusion in the Regional

Transportation Plan Update. The list of 19 projects depends on future public hearings and on money becoming available. These plans call for adding stop lights, protected left turn lanes, widening some intersections, installing traffic circles, adding sidewalks and the unique step<sup>9</sup> of calling for the development of a solar-powered passenger rail vehicle.

Currently there is no active consideration of a park-and-ride facility to be built at or near the intersection of Highways 1 and 9. This project has been discussed previously but is not included in current plans. A factor to be considered with such a park-and-ride lot is the surrounding road infrastructure. Improvements to Highway 1 from the Fishhook to Chestnut Street would include replacing the bridge over the San Lorenzo River. North River Street and part of Highway 9 would also need improvements. Previous recommendations have not been implemented due to lack of funding and priority status. Caltrans has prepared a Project Study Report for the park-and-ride project and it is currently under consideration for inclusion in the Expenditure Plan for the proposed November 2004 transportation measure. A large lot has the potential for significantly reducing the flow of traffic to UCSC during the school year, and then serving as a park-and-ride for the beach and Boardwalk during the summer season. Express buses could serve the lot and the two major destinations in the city. Some of the same thinking might even be applied to leasing a portion of the nearby Gateway Shopping Center parking lot.

### ***Santa Cruz Metropolitan Transit District (METRO)***

Santa Cruz Metro was generously commented upon when the Master Transportation Study was developed. Successful implementation of the MTS greatly depends on increased ridership of the Metro. The Grand Jury recognizes that the Metro is a countywide operation. For the purpose of this review, however, the current Grand Jury will focus on how the Metro can accomplish some of the goals set forth in the city's MTS.

The 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake caused irreparable damage to the Metro infrastructure. Maintenance, operations and fueling activities have necessarily been scattered, resulting in increased operating costs and inefficiencies. Now, after more than ten years of research and planning, the Metro is prepared to construct the new Metro Base in the Harvey West area. Final financing has the project on hold.

Transit officials believe the Metro is working as well as can be expected within the limitations of its facilities and funding. Adjustments to routes are constantly being analyzed and fine-tuned to best meet demands. A new route (#20) was recently added to serve as a line between UCSC and the research park area on the lower west side. The Metro participated in the recently completed UCSC Comprehensive Transit Study that looked at the interaction between the UCSC Shuttle-Service and the Santa Cruz Metro.

The MTS frequently refers to an objective of having cluster housing, retail outlets and employment within a five to 10 minute walk from transit. Transit officials feel this goal

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<sup>9</sup> Santa Cruz Sentinel, January 23, 2004.

would require significant redevelopment to mixed-use facilities, and considering the existing population distribution, may be difficult to attain. At the same time, the Metro has developed a long range plan for a Metro Center renovation of its existing downtown facility. This is designed as a mixed-use project adding commercial, office and housing units above an enlarged multi-modal transit center including AMTRAK, Caltrain, Greyhound and SC Metro service in downtown Santa Cruz. While construction is in the future, this Metro plan could serve as a model for other mixed-use projects needed to accomplish the goals of the MTS. The MTS says that to maintain current vehicle traffic levels, transit ridership levels need to increase 125% by 2020. (3.8% to 8.6% current usage). This would require a doubling of the number of buses on the road today. Transit officials say the inefficiencies of city infrastructure limit the opportunities for such growth. At some point in the future the Metro would like to use articulated buses on selected routes to increase capacity in the future.

The Santa Cruz Metropolitan Transit District is facing many obstacles to any plans for growth, let alone maintaining its current operations. A recent Santa Cruz Sentinel article said, "It's all part of what the district is calling a fiscal emergency."<sup>10</sup>

## **Findings**

1. The Master Transportation Study cost a total of \$632,000:
  - \$250,000 from UCSC.
  - \$250,000 from City of Santa Cruz general fund.
  - \$32,000 grant from Monterey Bay Unified Air Pollution Control Board for general use.
  - \$50,000 grant from Monterey Bay Unified Air Pollution Control Board for pedestrian study.
  - \$50,000 grant from Transportation Development Authority for Soquel Avenue bike lane study project.
2. The Master Transportation Study took over two years to develop.
3. The MTS was accepted as a foundation for transportation to be incorporated in the policies, programs and projects in the 2020 General Plan process for the City of Santa Cruz.
4. A recurring theme in the MTS suggests three basic requirements for reducing the impact of growing traffic:
  - a. Use of carpools and ride sharing.
  - b. Increase walking and bicycling.
  - c. Significantly increase ridership on the SC Metro.

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<sup>10</sup> [Santa Cruz Sentinel](#), 10 April 2004.

5. The automobile is the predominant method of travel in Santa Cruz.
6. If the traffic management measures suggested in the MTS prove successful, Vehicle Hours of Delay in 2020 will be approximately 15% worse than today. If they are not, VHD is projected to increase 92%.
7. One and one half pages of the MTS's 284 pages look at traffic considerations generated by UCSC.
8. UCSC growth is seen as an issue for future consideration with respect to traffic congestion.
9. UCSC's Long Range Development Plan includes 6,000 additional students that will further affect traffic congestion and parking in Santa Cruz.
10. The MTS refers to a "high-occupancy passenger connection from UCSC to regional transit via a new access method needs to be evaluated as a potentially more efficient and effective route to reduce Westside traffic impact and serve local and regional UCSC travel markets."<sup>11</sup>
11. The MTS was precluded from any consideration of an eastern access to UCSC as a stipulation in the agreement setting up the MTS.
12. City Council, by motion and acceptance, will not entertain the idea of any road through Pogonip.
13. The MTS is seen by the City Council as a framework. Its recommendations are non-binding.
14. City Transportation Commission is charged to develop specific plans to implement the MTS.
15. Santa Cruz City Council approved of 19 prioritized projects for roadway modification and signal projects.
16. Santa Cruz Metro ridership should increase 125% by 2020, according to MTS.

## **Conclusions**

1. UCSC appears to have been short-changed by the MTS despite contributing more than one-third of the funding for the study. Considering the amount of traffic generated by the university, and the increased traffic congestion and parking by an additional 6,000 students, it deserves more than a page and a half devoted to its

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<sup>11</sup>City of Santa Cruz Master Transportation Study, page 280.



impact. To make matters worse, the title of its chapter suggests that the university growth is an issue for future consideration, rather than something to look at now.

2. In the original requirement precluding the MTS from consideration of any eastern access to the university, and again by restating the sentiment of the City Council in a motion to not entertain any road through the Pogonip, the City Council has boxed itself in. Given the traffic congestion and parking problems surrounding UCSC, the citizens of Santa Cruz have the right to expect their elected representatives to solve the problem.
3. A viable, though partial, solution to traffic congestion in the city could be the construction of a park-and-ride facility at or near the intersection of Highways 1 and 9, with express bus service to and from major destinations (UCSC and the beach area).
4. Traffic congestion and parking problems will continue to escalate unless traffic management measures suggested in the MTS prove successful.

**Recommendations**

1. The City of Santa Cruz should develop a plan to solve the UCSC traffic impact problems for now as well as in the future.
2. A park-and-ride facility should be developed at or near the intersection of Highways 1 and 9, with express bus service to major destinations within the city.
3. The City of Santa Cruz should develop a short-range plan to mitigate existing, escalating traffic flow and parking problems beyond those offered in the 19 prioritized projects passed on January 20, 2004.

**Responses Required**

<b>Entity</b>	<b>Finding</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>	<b>Respond Within</b>
City of Santa Cruz	1 - 16	1, 2, 3	90 Days (Sept. 30, 2004)
Santa Cruz Metro	4, 5, 16	2	60 Days (August 30, 2004)

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