

History of Santa Cruz County Bicycle Advisory Committee

By Rick Hyman

The Bicycle Committee was started in 1975 in the County Parks Department. Robert Leibold, president of the Santa Cruz County Cycling Club, was hired to run the committee. Two years later, the Committee became advisory to the Transportation Commission, which was originally a part of the County Planning Department. Some of the first attendees were Gordon Lion, Elizabeth Schilling, the late Don Passerino and the late author Tom Cuthbertson. In these early days, any cyclist who attended a meeting was considered a member. In 1987 membership was formalized through appointment by Commissioners at 7, then 13, and currently 11 representatives plus alternates. Probably over 100 folks have served at one time or another – some for short periods; others, such as Kem Akol, Gary Milburn, Piet Canin, Jim Langley, Bill Fieberling and Kevin Karplus for many years each. Staff have included Mark Jansen, Holly Tyler, Laurel Wilson, Jack Witthaus, Jim Walgren, Teresa Buika, Julie Munnerlyn, Sean Co, Heath Maddox, Luis Mendez, Cory Caletti, and Anais Schenk.

One role that the Bicycle Committee has is to review project plans. One recent accomplishment was to convince Caltrans to refine a proposal for rumble strips in the shoulder along the entire stretch of Highway One from Santa Cruz to Davenport. The compromise was for the strips to be installed only where the shoulder was at least feet wide, and to install them on the shoulder stripe itself. Another accomplishment was to get the design changed on the new bike-ped bridge that will be built across Highway 1 at Chanticleer. Cyclists will be able to ride across it without dismounting, as the original plans would have required.

Another role of the Bicycle Committee has been participation in the planning processes that derive, prioritize and then fund bicycle projects. Very early on the Committee helped develop a list of bike lanes for the County to install, and by the early 1980s several main roads, like Soquel Drive, 7th Avenue, 17th Avenue, Capitola Road and East Cliff Drive had bike lanes on them. The Committee has similarly been active in spearheading and influencing bike plans for Santa Cruz City, Capitola, Scotts Valley, Watsonville and UCSC.

The Bike Committee has also been active in supporting and encouraging safe cycling. Members have had a hand in the development of the following programs, reports and handouts:

- safety measures to implement during construction activities
- brochures on preventing bike theft and bike parking at special events
- bike hazard reporting
- Bike to Work days
- Community Traffic Safety Coalition
- County Bicycle Map
- bicycle education
- County street sweeping scheduling
- bicycle facilities inventory

The Bike Committee does not have the opportunity to review all bicycle-related transportation projects and its recommendations have not always been accepted. Nevertheless, it is vitally important as being an available, formal, institutional voice for cyclists within the complex political bureaucracy. Decision-makers know that the Committee exists and can offer credible advice on the projects and plans that they consider. It is one of the earliest such committees and has functioned continuously for 40 years. It is one reason that Santa Cruz is a Gold Bicycle Friendly Community. All its meetings are open to the public – so feel free to attend and provide input. And, vacancies frequently exist, if anyone wants to join.