

Caltrans rejects bike lane on Richmond-San Rafael Bridge

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Posted: 02/05/2009 10:27:56 PM PST

SAN FRANCISCO - A Marin-led push to create bicycle and pedestrian access on the Richmond-San Rafael Bridge has been shot down again by California Department of Transportation officials, who say it's too dangerous.

The Bay Conservation and Development Commission heard plans Thursday to set up temporary concrete railings in the shoulder area of the 4.2-mile span to allow for access. Marin Supervisor Steve Kinsey, a member of the Metropolitan Transportation Commission, brought the plan to Caltrans in November.

On Monday he got its answer: no.

"You would have trouble getting emergency crews to a crash with only two lanes," said Richard Land, Caltrans engineer, who cited figures on other bridges indicating that eliminating the shoulder would create more crashes on the span. "Everything is more narrow and you would have less space to work with."

He also noted the high winds on the span, citing big rigs that turned over in a January 2008 storm.

But Deb Hubsmith, advocacy director for the Marin County Bicycle Coalition, said figures show there was a decrease in accidents on the Richmond-San Rafael Bridge when the shoulder was eliminated during retrofitting in 2004 and 2005.

"This could actually improve safety," she said, adding that emergency crews could use the 8-foot-

wide bike and pedestrian lane to get to emergency scenes more rapidly.

Hubsmith acknowledged the high winds, and said access could be limited during storms.

Cycling advocates have been lobbying for the project for more than a decade. San Francisco Bay Trail advocates also support the plan because it would close a gap in the system that allows people to make their way around the bay on bike or foot.

The Metropolitan Transportation Commission thought it would cost between \$15 million and \$20 million to get a pilot project rolling, but Caltrans said it would cost \$60 million or more.

As an alternative, Caltrans said shuttles could be used to get people across the span, but biking advocate Robert Raburn described that as a "YouTube" way to experience crossing the span.

Caltrans is looking at eventually creating a third bridge lane - making three lanes in each direction - to handle traffic. Because it has a say in development near water, the Bay Conservation and Development Commission would have to consent for that to happen. As part of the approval, it could require Caltrans to grant access to bicycles and pedestrians.

If a third lane would be used for traffic, a moveable barrier could be installed and used as a bike lane during non-peak hours.

In April 2008 the commission voted to support the concept of creating access on the bridge, but did not take a position on the pilot project Thursday.

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