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Santa Cruz gets state grant to improve school route safety

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As part of a \$46 million grant program to improve safety of school routes, Caltrans has given Santa Cruz money to reduce potential harm for children walking to and from school around Mission Street.

City officials were not immediately available Thursday to explain exactly how they plan to use the \$172,330 in state funds, but a Caltrans spokesman said the city had requested the cash to create "alternative adjacent routes to Highway 1 for bicycles and pedestrians."

Caltrans said the funds will be used for new sidewalks, bike trails and marked crosswalks. The money will also pay for education and traffic enforcement activities that promote safe walking and bicycling to school.

The Caltrans report said the funds should improve the routes around Bay View, Mission Hill and Westlake public schools, as well as Holy Cross, Spring Hill and Gateway private schools. The school closest to Mission is Bay View, which sits at a dangerous intersection with Bay Street that has been the site of two fatal bicycle accidents since August 2007.

Alan Pagano, superintendent of Santa Cruz City Schools, applauded Caltrans' decision to improve local streets.

"I'm extremely pleased to hear additional dollars may be applied in support of student safety, which is the district's highest priority," Pagano said.

The Caltrans grants for 121 projects are designed to give students in grades K-8 easier ways to safely get to school.

"Safety is Caltrans' No. 1 priority, and this program will make sure our children's travel to and from school is safe and healthy," said Caltrans Director Will Kempton.

In 2000, California became the first state in the nation to legislate a state Safe Routes to School program. To date, Caltrans has awarded \$196 million for 709 projects through its state program.

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