

King Street bicycle boulevard on hold

by Genevieve Bookwalter

SANTA CRUZ — Tentative plans for a bicycle boulevard on King Street -- a route proposed after two cyclists died on Mission Street in 18 months -- have been shelved indefinitely as the city deals with a \$6.5 million deficit.

That did not sit well with cyclists who told city leaders they were angry that it was not listed in Santa Cruz's three-year capital improvement plan discussed on Tuesday.

"King Street is the most important project for cyclists," said Micah Posner, head of bicycle advocacy group People Power. "We need it and we deserve it and we've been asking for it for a long time."

But Chris Schneiter, assistant director of Santa Cruz Public Works, said the studies needed before building the boulevard would take money that the city does not have. In addition, Schneiter said, traffic reports show very few accidents on King Street now, so cyclists already can ride it safely.

"If we had a couple more people and a couple more hundred thousand dollars, maybe we could do this," Schneiter said.

That did not sit well with Posner or about 10 others who joined him at the meeting.

David Bernard, who lives on Sherman Street off of King, said he is not a bicycle advocate but would like the traffic rerouted so his two kids, ages 10 and 8, can ride on King Street safely.

"I support any plan to mitigate traffic on King," Bernard said.

The King Street bicycle boulevard was proposed last year after the two cyclists were killed on Mission Street, the city's busiest thoroughfare, carrying 50,000 cars each day. Mission runs parallel to King, a relatively quiet neighborhood street with speed bumps and roundabouts that carries up to 8,000 cars each day.

City leaders last summer were considering three possible alternatives for a King Street bicycle boulevard to divert cyclists off Mission. One included removing parking along the street and creating bike lanes; another would divert thousands of cars off King to allow safer cycling without bike lanes; and a third would widen the street to accommodate both bike lanes and on-street parking.

But studies examining how traffic would be rerouted and the effects on neighbors are needed before the project can move forward, Schneiter said.

City Council members, who already have cut funding for the Teen Center, Beach Flats Community Center, Harvey West Pool and more to accommodate their growing deficit, had little to offer the cyclists.

"We are in a zero-sum game here," said Mayor Cynthia Mathews.

Almost all of the projects that were discussed at Tuesday's study session had outside funding or were critical to infrastructure, like new pilings on the Santa Cruz Municipal Wharf. The final spending plan should be approved in June with the city's budget.