

## Walk-Bike-Bus-Rail

COAST provides advocacy, education and outreach to improve transportation options in the Santa Barbara and Ventura regions, promoting rail, bus, bike, and pedestrian access.

## How to reach us

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## E-mail discussion list

Participate in discussions of local and regional transportation issues; receive notices of meetings and events. Subscribing is free and easy. Just visit:

<http://groups.google.com/group/coastsb>

## COAST General Meeting

Our General Meetings discuss transportation issues affecting the Santa Barbara region. Meetings are open to the public. Location: 15 E. Carrillo Street, Santa Barbara. They are held the second Wednesday of each month, 12 noon to 1:15 pm. Please check our website for updates.

## COAST Monthly Mixer

Please join us the second Thursday of each month from 5-7 PM at the El Paseo Restaurant in Santa Barbara.

## Walking Wednesdays

COAST organizes monthly walking tours on the fourth Wednesday of each month during the summer that are free and open to the public.

## Support COAST

COAST depends on you to create better transportation options in Santa Barbara and beyond. Support COAST by making a donation. Just use the enclosed envelope. Thank you!

## Special Commemorative Issue

# Twenty Years Ago: Locals Defeat the Freeway Cartel

By Alex Pujo



It will be 20 years this spring since a remarkable series of events profoundly affected all future transportation and land use policies in our area. Many readers of these pages will vividly remember where they were on Wednesday, April 21, 1993 when Caltrans unveiled plans for widening Highway 101 south of Milpas during an all-day workshop at the Miramar Hotel: They were there.

The Santa Barbara County Association of Governments (SBCAG), our regional transportation authority, had actively pursued the widening of 101 since the late 1980s. This obscure agency met monthly at locations around the County (*"If it is February, this must be Solvang"*) and it was plain to see that in 1993 its Board was simply overwhelmed by the complexity of state and federal programs that

brought substantial transportation funds to our area in those affluent years.

Simply put, SBCAG acts as the narrow passage in the hour glass where state and federal money funnels down to local governments and agencies. It is ruled by the five County Supervisors and one council member from each city in the county –regardless of size. For most Board members, these monthly meetings were a nightmare of confusing acronyms, rules and deadlines; by the time they understood them, their term was up and somebody else replaced them. Before the 101 controversy, meetings were unattended by the public, and short – sometimes less than one hour. The Board dutifully rubberstamped the agenda provided by **Jerry Lorden**, their Executive Director since forever, not coin-

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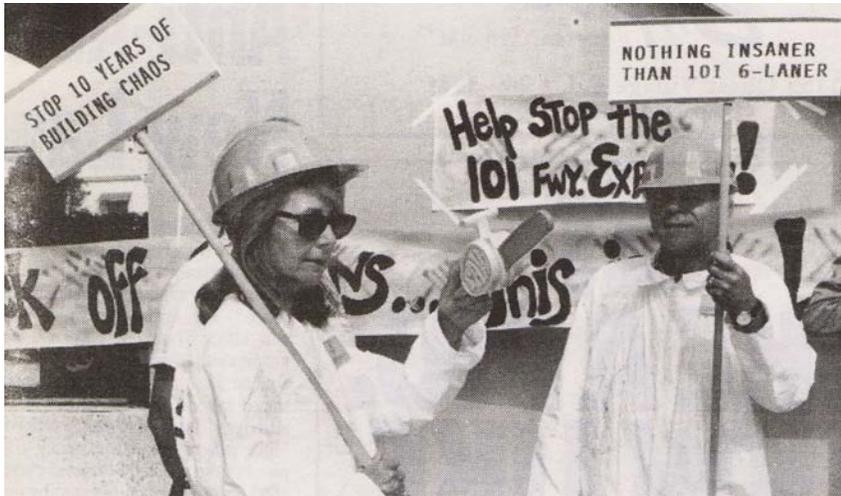
identally a former Caltrans employee.

The widening of 101 in Goleta (Fairview to Castillo) was completed in 1989, the same year that county voters approved **Measure D** -the original half-cent sales tax for local transportation later renewed as **Measure A** in 2008. The main goal of 'D'

was to provide funds for deteriorating county roads and streets, but it also funded the expansion of a dozen highway interchanges *and it allocated \$15 million for widening 101 from Milpas to the Ventura County line.* (In reality, \$15M was just 'seed money' to attract State and Federal funds for a much larger project, a 'detail' hidden in the fine print of the ballot measure.)

This is where our story begins. In March 1993 Caltrans releases the draft environmental impact report (EIR) for the project and announces the Miramar workshop. The size of the documents is intimidating but a scan of the EIR reveals, to everyone's dismay, that the widening does not consist of adding extra width to an existing, technically substandard but nevertheless scenic highway, but instead it is a new, raised and straighter roadbed to meet current standards: a six-to-eight lane concrete channel mostly devoid of vegetation.

The proposed loss of 3,000 trees and bushes dominates the local news in 1993. It would be difficult to overstate the role that newspapers play in these pre-internet days as Santa Barbara's forum for announcements and calls to action. The **News-Press** is read every morning and letters to the editor religiously scanned, debated and answered. On April 2<sup>nd</sup> a lengthy editorial written by **Lee Moldaver**, **Fred Usher** and **Alex Pujo** alert readers about "a new Highway 101 fiasco brewing" with detailed information about the project's profound impacts; the role of SBCAG



*The County Administration Building on June 17, 1993*

("SB who?") as an agent for Caltrans; how traffic data is skewed to make the widening look inevitable; and how alternatives to improve mobility in the corridor (rail, transit, improvement to frontage roads, connectivity across the freeway to minimize use of the mainline, etc.) are dismissed.

The timing cannot be worse. The "crosstown freeway" (remember those freeway lights?) has just been completed after four miserable years (1988-92) of dust and disruption, and people are furious at the prospect of more of the same. Elected officials are caught flat-footed. **Harriett Miller**, Santa Barbara's representative at SBCAG, initially supports the party line but **Mayor Sheila Lodge** and councilmember **Gil Garcia** will not. County Supervisors take a deep breath. Public Works directors and traffic engineers everywhere close ranks behind **Lorden** citing traffic data ("The widening is not a matter of if, but when, and how") and Measure D ("The project was approved by the voters"). But now these voters are asking: "If traffic grows 2% every year and we need six lanes now, when will we need eight?"

On April 29, **The Independent** ("Can Caltrans be stopped?") features photo simulations from Caltrans' EIR. Martha Sadler wonders if Santa Barbara "can escape the fate of San Fernando Valley cities". It is the first of many insightful stories to follow.

On May 3<sup>rd</sup>, at the request of Montecito

resident **Lois Roeser**, freeway opponents meet at the Miramar Hotel for breakfast. The group continues to meet weekly and it becomes "**Grassroots 101**". They are: **Larry Wilson**, **Ralph Fertig**, **Alex and June Pujo**, **John Clark**, **Pam and Juergen Boehr**, **Steve Traxler**, **Phil Schilling**, **Jerry White**, **Lee Moldaver**, **Frank Ellis**, **Donald Pearce**, **Benjamin Sawyer**, and others.

Meanwhile at the News-Press **Melinda Burns**

works overtime distilling techno-speak into basic questions: What is SBCAG? Where do funds for the widening come from? Can the funding be re-allocated to other projects with the same goal? The letters are running 10 to 1 against the widening. A petition started by **June Pujo** at the Miramar now is circulating at street corners and reaching 6,000 signatures.

In mid-May, prodded by its Planning Commission, the City of Santa Barbara initiates policy changes to gain greater control over highway improvements in the Coastal Zone. This will lead to the adoption of "Highway 101 Design Guidelines" governing parkway aesthetics, a process replicated at the County level in the following months.

In June and July the Montecito Association, led by **Bill Raymond** and **John Venable**, organizes six workshops at the Montecito Union School ("Info 101") to analyze different aspects of the EIR. Over 400 separate letters, from one to 50 pages long, including comments by the City and County of Santa Barbara, are submitted to Caltrans exposing EIR deficiencies.

At this crucial time, 1<sup>st</sup> District Supervisor **Naomi Schwartz** rises to the occasion with her undeniable leadership skills. Working behind the scenes and treating carefully, Naomi establishes contacts with all parties in search of consensus. At her request, SBCAG organizes a workshop in Santa

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Barbara on June 9 where 120 people voice their opposition to the project. On June 11 the News-Press endorses the widening but, on the 17th it reverses its position and questions its rationale. This is the same day that SBCAG meets in Santa Barbara to vote on the Regional Transportation Plan that contains the widening. A colorful crowd with placards, costumes, fire trucks and Dalmatian dogs demonstrates at the entrance to the Administration Building. **Supervisor Schwartz** proposes to delay the adoption of the plan and directs staff to recruit a consultant to study alternatives to the project.

This marks the beginning of the end.



View from the Olive Mill overpass. Photo simulation from Caltrans 1993 EIR for the Hwy 101 widening proposal

The next year Parsons/Brinkerhoff would complete the 'Alternatives Study' and conclude that improvements to freeway and service roads, combined with transit and rail service and policies to manage congestion, could avoid the need to widen the freeway in the foreseeable future. SBCAG would appoint a citizens' task force to

select projects; a list of "Operational Improvements" would be approved in 1997 and eventually built.

As the threat of the widening recedes, one half of **Grassroots 101**, including most Montecito residents, considers their work done. The other half, joined by **Grant House, Barry Siegel, Robert Bernstein, Mike**

**and Ann Lawler** and many others will go on to influence SBCAG's transportation funding, the City of Santa Barbara Circulation Element, the Milpas roundabout and a long list of projects and policies worthy of another story. In 2001, this group becomes **COAST**.

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## Old Friends, Back Again

By Lee Moldaver

Like the proverbial *bad penny*, two "old friends" in any central coast transportation conversation – 101 widening, and passenger rail service – are back in the news again. Freeway widening, because of alleged design/landscaping regression back toward the *bad old days* of the early '90s that spawned **COAST's** precursor, **Grassroots 101**. Passenger rail service, not only because it still has not happened, despite voter approval to fund "trial" or demonstration service between Oxnard-Ventura, and Goleta-Santa Barbara, but because it may also be moving in the *wrong* direction.

Many "understandings" the community thought it had reached with Caltrans regional office are being quietly unwound by state headquarters. Caltrans bureaucrats are intent on intensifying the "concreting" effect of new lanes and walls, and reduce re-landscaping the corridor after their work is done. We, the locals, are subsidizing these projects via our Measure A local sales tax revenue. This means

that more local money goes to Caltrans for weaker designs, and *less* local money to fund our many unmet local needs. Not what most of us envisioned when we voted *for* Measure A.

Two memories resonate. One, of U.S. Senator **Frank Lautenberg**, co-author of the original ISTEA legislation that began to reform federal transportation investment in local projects, warning **SBCAG** elected officials that *if* they used federal highway money to build "immense, tree-less concrete freeway corridors" in *this* area, that would be "like a knife to my heart." The other, of **Barry Siegel**, asking SBCAG to give the "operational improvements" on 101 "a real chance before you go for a *full-widening* scenario, since it could turn out that we don't need it." Years later, we again find ourselves stumbling near this same precipice. The fact that the "train" part of SBCAG's commitment for "A lane and a train" for commuters on the Goleta-Oxnard corridor remains unrealized, is a source of great frustration.

Add to that a political effort to cancel California's Amtrak **Surfliner** funding, and shift local commuter rail efforts from the generally well-managed **Amtrak** program, to an effort to join **Metrolink**. Apart from the fact that **Metrolink** is deeply in debt, can we wonder how the smallest, most distant part of the **Metrolink/LOSSAN** realm could assure *any* new service, or a "fair share" of future rail funding, when competing against LA and Orange County rail needs?

Right now, can we even influence our own, local SBCAG or Ventura County Transportation Commission to execute local rail needs on a cost-effective, timely basis? As **Jerry Brown** seeks to shift every "flexible rail dollar" to subsidize his Central Valley *high speed rail* "legacy project", the hope of a commuter rail alternative to 101 widening seems to be drifting further away, not getting any closer.

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## Walking Wednesdays Roll into their Fourth Season

By Caitlin Carlson

COAST's Walking Wednesdays tour returns this year with a diverse lineup of speakers that will make 2013 our best year yet! Our kick off will be a unique walk focused on the up-and-coming, yet historical neighborhood of the **Funk Zone**. Led by **Nathan Vonk** of [sbartsblog.org](http://sbartsblog.org), this walk will explore the history of the neighborhood, and the new creative influx of artists and business owners who have given the Funk Zone its distinct character. We will meet on Wednesday, March 27 at 5:30pm at Hotel Indigo located at 121 State St.

Walking Wednesdays will run the 4th Wednesday of every month from March until August, where **Dennis Allen** will host

the finale walk with his latest projects related to green building. We will also have architect extraordinaire **Anthony Grumbine** of Harrison Associates lead a Santa Barbara themed architecture walk, along with many more exciting speakers who will show us undiscovered areas and history around Santa Barbara. For a schedule of Walking Wednesdays, please subscribe to our email list or check our website!

COAST would like to thank our sponsors: **Harrison Associates, Allen Associates** and **Yardi** for allowing us to put on these fun, educational walks for the Santa Barbara community. Wear your walking shoes and we'll see you there!



Tour leader **Dennis Thompson** makes a point during a tour of affordable housing projects in Santa Barbara last summer. We are very lucky to have such knowledgeable docents and we heartily thank all of them. Come join us for one of our walks this summer!

**WE THANK ALL THE ORGANIZATIONS, BUSINESSES AND INDIVIDUALS WHO SUPPORTED US DURING THE YEAR 2012.**

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Last but not least, a big thank-you to Gary Gray, CPA, for doing our taxes and to the Inn of the Spanish Garden and Business First Bank for hosting our events.