

Bike lane plans still need work

City must resolve issues with other cities and Caltrans

BY JEN NOWELL
Daily Post Staff Writer

Menlo Park City Council members are interested in adding a bike lane on El Camino Real on a trial basis, but the city would first have to work out some issues with neighboring cities and Caltrans, which controls the road.

At Tuesday night's council meeting, Councilman Ray Mueller said he would like to approach Atherton and either Redwood City or Palo Alto to join the trial.

Transportation Manager Nikki Nagaya said city officials have meetings already set up with Palo Alto and Atherton to get feedback from the cities about the pilot program.

On Tuesday, council discussed a report by the city's planning department with the assistance of consultants that examined four options for El Camino.

Currently, El Camino is three lanes in both directions at the entrances to town, but becomes two lanes between Live Oak and Valparaiso avenues.

The options

One option would widen El Camino to six lanes and change the existing right-turn-only lanes into ordinary traffic lanes.

A second option would keep El Camino at two lanes in each direction and add bike lanes in both directions between Palo Alto and Atherton. The bike lanes would be 5-foot-wide, with a 3-foot-wide painted section separating bicyclists from drivers.

A third option would also add bike lanes in each direction between Sand Hill Road and Encinal Avenue, but the 5-foot-wide bike lanes would be separated from traffic by a 3-foot-wide raised curb. And a fourth option wouldn't make any changes.

To go forward with a pilot program, Nagaya said the city would also need to meet with Caltrans, which has ju-

isdiction over El Camino Real, about the design. She said the city needs to understand the permitting process for the pilot program and whether or not it would differ from a permanent installation.

Councilwoman Kirsten Keith said she would like to see the trial last at least a year to see whether the bike lanes will work.

City officials will now work out a timeline for the project, and Nagaya said it will take a couple of weeks to get everything together.

An environmental study for the project won't begin until council votes on a preferred alternative.

Chief Harold Schapelhouman of the Menlo Park Fire Protection District told the Post yesterday said that he would be open to a trial to test bike lanes on El Camino if the city would also be willing to do a trial of expanding the roadway to three lanes for cars in each direction throughout all of Menlo Park.

He said it doesn't seem reasonable to do one trial without trying the other.

The city's report said that expanding El Camino to six lanes would actually draw more cars, making traffic worse.

Idea criticized

But Schapelhouman said narrowing lanes, which would provide room for bike lanes, as traffic is getting worse on El Camino, doesn't make sense and seems counterintuitive.

Biking on El Camino isn't the smartest or safest thing to do, Schapelhouman said. When it comes to a collision between a car and bicyclist, the bicyclist is going to lose, he said.

Schapelhouman called the El Camino report "biased." He said that neither the consultants nor city officials talked to the fire district, which serves Menlo Park, as well as Atherton, East Palo Alto and some unincorporated county lands.

He said he doesn't want to see anything done to El Camino until "a comprehensive public safety analysis is included in the report." Any changes to El Camino affect emergency response times, Schapelhouman said.