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City of Santa Cruz Transportation and Public Works Commission
c/o Nathan Nguyen and Christina Alberti
809 Center Street, Room 201
Santa Cruz, CA 95060

October 16, 2026

Re: Agenda Item #3 Water Street Safety Project (c402608)
Meeting Date: October 19, 2026

Dear Commissioners, Staff, and City Councilmembers,

Thank you for your work towards planning improved and protected bike lanes on Water Street. Your work is critically important in saving lives. Santa Cruz County has consistently experienced some of the highest rates of bicyclists and pedestrians killed in roadway crashes throughout the State of California, even compared to other communities which have a higher rate of bicycle and pedestrian activity, like San Francisco, Berkeley, Santa Barbara, Palo Alto and Davis!

In 2022, approximately **36%** of reported fatalities and serious injuries in Santa Cruz County were due to crashes including a bicyclist or pedestrian, usually impacted by a motor vehicle. Every 2nd or 3rd day, one of our community members is hit and killed or seriously injured on our county roadways, walking across a street or riding a bike lane, usually in a bike lane. A victim who is hit by a vehicle often is left with permanent injuries than can lead to lifelong physical and financial struggles which can shorten the lifespan of the injured person, even if they survive the initial impact. The **top 3 causes** of these deadly crashes include alcohol or drugs (21%), **unsafe speeding** (19%), and improper turning (19%). Almost all crashes which lead to such deaths and serious injuries are preventable! Together, we can and must do better.

The Community Traffic Safety Coalition (CTSC), a division of the Santa Cruz County Public Health Services Agency, is a working group of partner agencies and key stakeholders that meet regularly to work towards what is sometimes referred to as Vision Zero. Almost all crashes are preventable! Investing in and implementing infrastructure that has been proven to save lives, accounting for both human error, especially given people's harried lives and potential aggressive behavior, is a critically important investment in a community that has continued to grow in number of people and motor vehicles. The CTSC publishes important

Traffic Violence/ Crash Reports, the first in 2017 and the most recent was published in September 2026.

Given the high rate of deaths and serious injuries due to vehicle crashes, we support your proposal to implement separated bike lanes and improved pedestrian infrastructure on Water Street which could be an excellent route for cycling, either for biking through or safer access to businesses, as long as wisely designed protected bike lanes and well-marked pedestrian crosswalks are included. While our committee did not have time to delve into which of the three proposed plans we prefer, in general, creating substantial separation and concrete infrastructure between bike lanes and cars, can dramatically improve safety. We **support the narrowing of vehicular lanes**, which serves to slow traffic. Robust hard rubber separators (like the ones which line the bike lanes along the Boardwalk) or concrete separators or bollards or vehicle parking situated parallel to the bike lane can also serve as a barrier between bike and vehicular traffic as long as the bike lane has at least a at least 3 feet of clearance to accommodate a full swing of a car door. We do not recommend the standalone plastic separators which are easily damaged by a vehicle.

The National Association of City Transportation Officials (NACTO) provides superior standards for creating safe streets infrastructure serving all users, including bicyclists and pedestrians. Growing pedestrian and bicycle use has been shown to bring a more friendly, civic and business positive atmosphere to communities and downtowns. The National Complete Streets Coalition provides programs, resources, and advocacy efforts promoting the planning, design, and building of street which enable safe access for all users.

The Sierra Club supports the mission of protecting the planet and providing equitable access to jobs, school and services by helping people transport themselves in more sustainable ways than by private automobile, while at the same time protecting people's lives. Increasingly, more people in our community have expressed interest in biking and share that their greatest fear is the level of traffic violence and aggressive speeding.

We are excited to see how these plans move forward. We can take additional time to discuss which of the proposed plans we might prefer and provide that recommendation after our next monthly meeting.

Thank you for your work,

Mike Guth

Chair, Santa Cruz Group of the Ventana Chapter, Sierra Club