



A portion of West Cliff Drive was closed to traffic (lower portion of photo) or made one-way (upper portion) after suffering storm damage in January.  
(Kevin Painchaud / Lookout Santa Cruz)

STORMS 2023: ROAD TO RECOVERY

# City set to restore two-way traffic to stretch of West Cliff Drive



**BY MAX CHUN**  
Source: Lookout Santa Cruz



Two-way traffic on West Cliff Drive could be back as soon as the beginning of 2024, with Santa Cruz’s public works department recommending that the city council vote next week to restore both lanes between Columbia Street and Woodrow Avenue. The section between Woodrow and Almar Avenue that’s been completely closed to traffic is still about a year away from repair.

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The City of Santa Cruz plans to restore two-way traffic on a stretch of West Cliff Drive, saying that while a pilot project showed that turning the road into a one-way street was a popular and feasible idea, it would require more study and public consultation.

The city's public works department is recommending that city council vote next week to restore two-way traffic on the stretch of West Cliff between Columbia Street and Woodrow Avenue that has been open to only one-way traffic after sustaining damage during January storm surge. A stretch of the road west of Woodrow Avenue will remain fully closed as staff continue working on securing funding and finalizing repair design for the culvert along Bethany Curve.

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City transportation manager Matt Starkey told Lookout on Thursday that the one-way pilot showed that the idea of eliminating one lane of traffic on West Cliff Drive was feasible, and remains a viable option for the future. But he said the city would

need to conduct more public outreach and design planning to make the change permanently.

"The people using the path tended to like it, but we know that creates some tension in the neighborhood," he said. "So we need to go through a bigger community effort to see if we want to do this on more sections of the road."

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That will include more public engagement and continuing to form the long-term vision for the road that has already begun in the [aftermath of the winter's powerful storms](#).

"We were fortunate in this case that we could actually restore the road completely," said Starkey. "But we'll still be having discussions about reducing West Cliff to one lane and giving space for coastal erosion and recreation."

The city council voted in February to study a one-way pilot project on West Cliff, including collecting data on how closing the road for westbound trips affected vehicle traffic. In a [report set to go before the council next week](#) for approval, staffers said the closures decreased traffic going west toward Natural Bridges State Beach and also decreased traffic on a section of the road that remained open, heading east toward the wharf. Staff counted 1,020 fewer westbound trips at Mark Abbott Memorial Lighthouse, a 35% drop from what they estimated traffic would be if the road had been open both ways.



Traffic has been limited to one-way headed west on West Cliff Drive between Columbia Street and Woodrow Avenue.

(Kevin Painchaud / Lookout Santa Cruz)

The city also surveyed people on West Cliff Drive and at the Santa Cruz Wharf on how they felt about the pilot project and their vision for the future of West Cliff. Overwhelmingly, those surveyed told the city they supported removing parking and driving lanes to expand options for biking and walking. Another 36% of motorists on West Cliff also supported the one-way pilot project (25% disliked it and 39% didn't respond to the city's "thumb up/thumbs down" survey of drivers).

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"The biggest feedback was that people love spending time on West Cliff Drive and would like to have cyclists and pedestrians separate from each other and from cars, and that this was worth the elimination of a lane of traffic," the report reads. "Currently, the focus is to restore the existing conditions above the infill walls; however, reducing an auto lane to prioritize biking and walking should be investigated further in the 50-year visioning process."

The plan is for Granite Construction to start building



four infill walls to fortify the road within the next few weeks, and for two-way traffic to resume at the beginning of 2024. The full closure between Almar Avenue and Woodrow Avenue is still about a year away from repair, said Starkey. The city still has to secure funding and finalize design for the project, but he hopes that work can begin in spring 2024 and finish by the end of summer.



West Cliff Drive remains closed between Woodrow and Almar avenues, with repairs still perhaps a year away.  
(Kevin Painchaud / Lookout Santa Cruz)

"I found that the roadway widths [between Columbia Street and Woodrow Avenue] is where we have the most flexibility, because it has the greatest width," he said. "Had this failure occurred somewhere else on West Cliff that's more constrained, we would probably be having a different discussion about what we have to do."

Al Ramadan, leader of [resident group Save West Cliff](#), said he feels that the announcement shows that both the group's and the city's work to raise awareness and find solutions to the road is paying off.

"I think the city has done a really good job of coalescing all of the community input, and we're now starting to see early signs of a [50-year plan](#) draft," he said, adding that making sure repairs happened before [an El Niño winter](#) was a major goal. "It's been astounding what we have collectively achieved."

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Ramadan said he believes that with continued coordination between agencies and detailed long-term planning, West Cliff Drive can remain fully accessible.

"We believe there is a path where we can restore natural features and that we can provide full access," he said. "If we focus on the long-term plan, I think we can probably pull this off."

Some, however, remain concerned about traffic impacts due to the Bethany Curve closure. Eric Olsen lives on Almar Avenue, and said he is unhappy with the influx of traffic his street has seen since West Cliff was fully closed from Almar to Woodrow Avenue. While he said he's happy that two-way traffic will return, he is still displeased with the temporary cul-de-sacs installed at Oxford Way and Alta Avenue.

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"I don't think that's fair, because I don't believe everyone diverted from West Cliff was going down Oxford all of the sudden," he said. "So the burden has fallen squarely on Delaware [Avenue] and Almar."

Further, Olsen said he'd like to see the Almar detour be moved to Fair Avenue, a block west.

"It's wider, there are bike lanes, and it has continuous sidewalks," he said. "I really think they should reconsider whether the detour can be there."

Starkey said transportation staff will present their plan for West Cliff at Tuesday's [Santa Cruz City Council meeting](#), as well as share the results of the traffic studies conducted over the summer. Those looked at traffic volume, road usage and which stretches of the road would be best suited for one-way traffic.

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