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## A Roundabout on St. Mary's Road?

By *Sophie Braccini*



A roundabout could regulate the traffic at Rheem, St Mary's and a redirected Bollinger Picture courtesy of Fehr and Peers and the Town of Moraga

Bluffs residents came in number as Moraga's Traffic Safety Advisory Committee (TSAC) met on Jan 7th to hear the first presentation of a calming traffic plan proposed by the Town's traffic consultant Fehr and Peers, for the intersections of St Mary's Road at Rheem Blvd. and Bollinger Canyon. The hope of Public Works Director Jill Mercurio is to get a plan approved in time to qualify for funds from the anticipated federal stimulus package and solve traffic difficulties at two of the worst intersections in town.

The report focused primarily on the solutions proposed for the Rheem/St Mary's intersection, and declared the Rheem/Bollinger crossing to be Class A (good quality of service). Bluffs resident Frank Comprelli challenged this conclusion. "When you look at the intersection of St Mary's Road and Bollinger Canyon, traffic flow figures are not enough," he said, "The Bollinger Canyon Road-St. Mary's Road intersection is essentially a single chokepoint through which 153 homes must currently pass to access anywhere or anything in Moraga - shopping, banks, schools, parks, libraries, etc. - or other communities. There is no other choice - it is not a matter of preference." Comprelli said the main issue is not the average time spent waiting to enter traffic traveling along St. Mary's Rd., but the safety of doing so.

Other Bluffs residents concurred, reminding the committee that a proposal has been submitted to the Town to construct an additional 126 homes in Bollinger Valley, the resultant 279 homes representing 2957 auto trips to and from Bollinger Canyon every day through the chokepoint. "I agree with the consultant that the intersection is of category A," said Comprelli, "but that's for about 20 hours a day;

during 4 hours it deserves an F."

When the question of the pedestrians was raised, residents were even more concerned about safety. "Pedestrian safety at the intersection of Bollinger Canyon Road and St. Mary's Road, as well as along Bollinger Canyon Road leading to the intersection, ranges from pathetic to non-existent. The juxtaposition of the words 'pedestrian' and 'safety' in this context is a true oxymoron," explained Comprelli.

The report proposed several possible solutions, from the least expensive, creating pockets to facilitate left turns, to stop signs, to roundabouts without stop signs. The ultimate option would divert the end of Bollinger Canyon as it is now, to end at the crossing with Rheem.

This solution, which is the most expensive, would imply the building of a bridge over a creek on St Mary's College property; and this was the only option that completely satisfied the Bluffs residents. However, both cost and the need for a long review process preclude that option, at least in the short term. A roundabout that would involve Rheem Boulevard and St Mary's Road may be the first step.

The members of TSAC, led by Chair Barbara Simpson, had many questions for Mercurio as it attempted to gage the cost of each solution. "If a stimulus package is on its way, you must have a whole list of projects," added Simpson, "it needs to be prioritized." Other members of the committee had questions regarding the security of roundabouts, since they are not common in this area. Members of the committee agreed to drive/walk each intersection before the next meeting and asked Interim Chief of Police Robert Priebe to give them the latest incident figures.

At their next meeting in February, TSAC will receive and review the answers to its questions and make a recommendation to the Council, which is the deciding body. Mercurio believes that it is still possible to get the project ready to be granted money under a stimulus package, "it will depend on who will be required to approve the plan along the way," she said, "but I'm confident I could get the project ready for endorsement."

Reach the reporter at: [sophie@lamorindaweekly.com](mailto:sophie@lamorindaweekly.com)

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