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Canyon bridge closed indefinitely

By Sophie Braccini



When the Canyon bridge closed quickly and surprisingly on the evening of April 18, it impacted more than just drivers in local communities. Currently, not even pedestrians or bicyclists are authorized to cross the bridge that commands one of the only five exits out of the town of Moraga, prompting the town to declare a state of emergency.

The situation is particularly frustrating for the neighboring community of Canyon (see story below), and it presents several important challenges for Moraga: How unstable is the upslope hill which movement destabilized the bridge, what is needed to permanently stabilize it, should a temporary bridge be installed, how much will it cost, and is someone to be blamed for the closure?

A landslide reached and damaged the Canyon Bridge foundation. Photo provided

indefinitely.

Moraga Town Manager Robert Priebe said that on Monday, April 17 his staff was contacted by EBMUD engineers who were placing instrumentation on the landslide that started in January of last year.

The town says its first priority is to reopen a passage between the communities. The bridge is closed

"They noticed some visible movements (closer to the bridge) and called us," Priebe said.

Town staff was on site rapidly and found that there was separation between the road pavement and the southeast end of the bridge, creating a visible gap. The town's geotechnical consultants were called to the site and began measuring depth and progression of the earth movement. They confirmed that the upslope hillside of the bridge presented tension cracks and continuing mass landslide movements. They observed that the gap on pavement was widening and that one of the bridge's support beams was moving and not supporting the bridge as it is supposed to. The conclusion was that the bridge had to be closed immediately.

The hillside next to the bridge, up the Lafayette-Moraga Trail and below Country Club homes at the end of Augusta Drive, has been moving since January of 2016. Whether these movements impacted the side hill and the bridge has not been addressed officially. The town manager confirmed that EBMUD, who owns the hill and the trail, has been involved in discussions with the town.

On April 27 the town council and staff held a special meeting to answer questions and dispel rumors. Several residents recommended the installation of a temporary "Bailey bridge," including the former company commander of a combat engineering company who said his group used to build Bailey bridges that could be installed in a few days.

The town manager repeated that the town's priority was the safety of residents and the reopening of the road. Moraga resident Lance Larson insisted that a sound engineering process be followed, that site investigation should be done before any solution is decided.

Priebe asked and was granted by the council the immediate release of \$500,000 to fund studies and possible first solutions.

Moraga businesses and residents have been impacted by the closure of the bridge. The Saklan School in Moraga has several students and staff members that are coming from the Oakland/Montclair area who have been using the bridge every day.

Si Si Caffe, located on Country Club Drive, is a regular meeting place for bicyclists that roam the East Bay Hills. Owner Cathy Corsi said that the impact on her business was dramatic, especially during the weekend. The Moraga Horseman's Association representatives are also concerned with access to their horses on the south side of the bridge.

The ultimate solutions and costs are still very much unknown. One resident as well as Council Member Kymberleigh Korpus raised the issue of EBMUD's responsibility. But the town's priority is not to find whom to blame at this time, but to focus on public safety. Funding and responsibility will be addressed later.

The town created an ad-hoc page on its website to give daily updates to residents at www.Moraga.ca.us.

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[back](#)

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