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Moraga's arterials reopen

By Sophie Braccini



Edric Kwan holds a drawing he received with a thank you from a young Canyon resident. Photos Andy Scheck

Over the last two weeks Moraga was able to reopen Canyon Bridge and Rheem Boulevard, after the two major infrastructure failures disrupted traffic and cost the town over \$6.8 million to repair. In the words of council members, the town has turned the corner this November, at least for road repairs. The reimbursement expected from the Federal Emergency Management Agency is likely to take years.

A very young smiling Canyon resident came up to Public Works Director Edric Kwan on Nov. 21 and gave him a large drawing representing the Canyon Bridge and saying thank you. Near the bridge, a Canyon teen held a poster saying, "Canyon Says Thank You." For the small, unincorporated community, this day was the last of a long seven-month period during which their link to Moraga and fire and police services was severed. Beyond the very serious safety concerns, people going to school or work in Moraga, Moragans taking their kids to school in Canyon, and commuters using this Moraga south access needed to go through Pinehurst, the freeways and Moraga Road, turning the three-mile, 10-minute trip into 15 miles and 40 minutes of travel.

The bridge that was first crossed by fire and police vehicles on the opening is a one-lane overpass. The alternate traffic circulation is controlled by a light that is activated by a motion sensor or functions according to a predetermined timing during commute hours. A side path for pedestrians was also installed; bicyclists are asked to either dismount and walk their bike across, or respect the traffic lights. The bridge is indeed narrow, so users should respect the signal, since the hazard of oncoming traffic could be significant. Police Chief Jon King, who attended the opening, said that there would be a lot of police control at the bridge. He added that he would quickly post speed limit signs at both ends.

The bridge opened a few days before the end of November deadline.

During his thank you remarks, Kwan particularly praised Myers and Sons Construction, which he said worked from 4 a.m. to 7 p.m. and on weekends to finish the project ahead of schedule. Moraga Mayor Teresa Onoda thanked by name all "the guys" who did what had to be done to consolidate the site and install the bridge.

Kwan gave a glimpse of the administrative complexity of what the town navigated to secure emergency funding approval for the bridge, including having to build a single one-way lane, since otherwise it would not have fallen within the federal parameters. He also explained that the plan for a new bridge was already underway before the old one collapsed, but that the drawings and permits will need to be redone to take the landslide that caused the bridge to initially fail into consideration. He believes that the construction of the permanent new bridge will start in 2019.

Council Member Dave Trotter also thanked everyone, before expressing the town's frustration over the East Bay Municipal Utility District that owns the piece of property where the hill failed. He said that EBMUD will have to answer in the coming year about its responsibility in this incident. Two homes on Saint Andrews Drive, above the landslide, have been red-tagged because of it.

The week before, on Nov. 16, the town organized a big ceremony for the reopening of Rheem Boulevard after the repair of the sinkhole that had collapsed 20 months before. The ceremony was attended by Assemblywoman Catharine Baker and state Sen. Steve Glazer, as well as local officials. Moraga Chamber of Commerce distributed "I survived the sinkhole" bags filled with goodies and coupons from Rheem Center merchants happy to see normal traffic resume.

Kwan expects that it will take years for the town to get the money back from FEMA, but he is confident that the town went by the book and will eventually get back the funds that were spent.



State Sen. Steve Glazer and Assemblywoman Catharine Baker at the reopening of Rheem Boulevard after the sinkhole repair.



Happy cyclists are again able to cross the bridge for their bike rides.

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