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Challenging summer commute in Moraga

By *Sophie Braccini*

Going through Moraga this summer has brought its load of frustration to drivers. Trouble starts on Canyon Road before reaching town coming from the south. As this roving reporter can attest, those arriving at the one lane Canyon bridge around 4:30 p.m. are typically met with a string of cars waiting for the light to turn green and grant passage - the first obstacle in the commuter's quest to cross Moraga and reach Highway 24.

The light can be a bit long - a sign warns that the wait can be up to two minutes - but once it turns green, the string of cars cross the bridge at moderate speed. The minute the cars have cleared the bridge, however, there is no longer anything moderate about their speed. Cars soar on the now four-lane arterial, ignoring the quite visible 35 mph signs.

At the crossing between Moraga Road and Moraga Way, some cars turn left toward Orinda, but most continue straight.

There is no longer a turn for through traffic on St. Mary's Road this summer since PG&E is replacing pipes under the arterial. Those who nonetheless wander that way are stopped by utility personnel at the crossing with Rheem Boulevard and signaled to turn left. A few say the magic word and are allowed to continue on. Right now that word is "Bollinger," which gives access, but another employee watches out to make sure cars are turning right on Bollinger.

The PG&E personnel stationed at the crossing report that drivers are being very cooperative and are muscling their way through. They also indicate that the road can be reopened before the posted 7 p.m. time if the work objective of the day has been reached a bit sooner.

In the afternoon on Moraga Road the descent toward Lafayette often stops short after vehicles pass Campolindo High School. The backup continues all the way from the Lafayette sign to Mt. Diablo Boulevard, with cars inching forward, stuck in the narrow street constricted by multiple traffic lights before being released to the freeway, adding approximately 15 to 20 minutes of travel time from Moraga to Lafayette. Occasionally, a frustrated driver turns around and backtracks to the crossing with Rheem Boulevard, making a right turn there and heading toward Orinda to access 24 off of Acalanes Road.

Exacerbating the traffic headaches, Moraga Road, between Rheem and St. Mary's Road, was closed July 2 when a fire broke out off Moraga's Buckingham Drive, in the open space adjacent to Moraga Road (see related story, page A8). Traffic was seriously impacted, but PG&E eventually reopened St. Mary's Road to through traffic. One resident who needed to go to Concord at the beginning of the afternoon, and had not anticipated any traffic problem, reported being stuck in traffic for over an hour trying to get out of town; she wondered what it would be like if the town needed to be evacuated.

The choices offered by traffic apps such as Waze, which sends commuters through Moraga, have not been modified due to the heavy traffic and the one lane bridge.

For Burton Valley residents off Reliez Station and Glenside Road, however, the St. Mary's Road closure means a quieter summer.

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