

Miner Road closure to end Aug. 10 after problem vegetation removed

By Nick Marnell



PG&E electrical lines along Miner Road are highlighted in yellow. Photo courtesy City of Orinda

To outline a vegetation removal project along Miner Road, the city of Orinda held a July 26 neighborhood meeting that included representatives from Pacific Gas and Electric Co., the city and the Moraga-Orinda Fire District. PG&E and the city explained that 110 trees needed either pruning or removal along the road in order to maintain a safe distance from electrical power lines and to provide adequate clearance for emergency vehicles.

At the meeting, not one neighbor complained about removing the trees, all located on private property. Not one neighbor threatened to sue the utility or the city. Not one neighbor objected that the project was approved without an environ-

mental impact review.

Mainly because not one neighbor showed up.

"We have received very little negative feedback from the community," said Larry Theis, Orinda director of public works and engineering, noting that the city had done extensive outreach explaining the need for the project through council meetings, signage and social media.

MOFD Fire Chief Dave Winnacker concurred. "People have gone out of their way to assure me that this is a benefit to their community," the chief said. "It's a big help for us to secure these routes out of north Orinda."

According to PG&E represen-

tative Matthew McLain, a contractor will prune 84 trees along Miner Road and remove 26 of them. The work began Aug. 6 at the top of Miner and required the closure of the road. McLain said the company will finish the job by Aug. 10.

"After this, we will be done in Orinda," McLain said.

Theis said that because the paving of Miner Road will begin in the fall or next spring, the problem vegetation needed to be removed so that the construction work could be safely completed. The city also required that the work end before the start of school.

The city received no compensation from PG&E for the vegetation removal.

Highway 24 gridlock: Why no local notifications or traffic control?

By Nick Marnell



The reason for the major congestion Photo courtesy KTVU

A single vehicle accident on Highway 24 near the Orinda BART station on July 21 caused a traffic standstill on the westbound freeway, with local residents complaining about two-hour delays to drive between Pleasant Hill and Orinda, gridlock on downtown Lafayette streets and no traffic control on either the highway or the on-off ramps in each community.

According to the Contra Costa County Sheriff's Office, at 9:02 that Saturday morning an Orinda

police officer attempted to conduct a traffic stop near St. Stephens Drive. As the officer approached the vehicle, it sped off and entered westbound Highway 24; the car was later found wrecked on the freeway. One occupant died, the other was arrested and is being held at the Martinez Detention Facility. The incident remains under investigation.

The California Highway Patrol cited the accident investigation as the main reason for the traffic con-

gestion. "So many steps have to be taken and followed," said CHP officer Brandon Correia. "The Sheriff's Office had to conduct quite a large investigation and collect evidence and photos. In some cases, such as this, we have to shut the freeway down to preserve the scene and all evidence."

The freeway stayed clogged for nearly six hours, with traffic funneled from five lanes to one at the Camino Pablo exit. Orinda and Lafayette residents received no alerts on Nixle, a community notification service provided by public agencies.

Correia said the CHP does not use Nixle, but neither did the Orinda or Lafayette police departments. "The city of Orinda or Orinda Police do not do Nixle alerts for the CHP," said Mark Nagel, Orinda chief of police. "This occurred in their jurisdiction. I know it was in Orinda, but all of the traffic matters fell to the CHP."

Nor was there any apparent

traffic control on the highway. "For freeway control, we don't stand on the road and hand direct traffic," Correia said. "We use our cone patterns, flare patterns, and patrol vehicles' emergency lights to direct traffic." Nagel said that his officers were removed from the scene, per protocol. "CHP was on scene and doing traffic control for the entire incident," Nagel said.

The brunt of the congestion occurred in Lafayette, especially on the downtown streets. The CHP issued a Sigalert, a notification of a major traffic incident, but Correia said that the CHP did not expect the high level of traffic activity in the city or on the on-off ramps to the freeway. "I'm not sure if it was communicated to Lafayette Police how much of a backup from the on-off ramps was created into their city and what they could have possibly done or not done to assist with that," Correia said.

Which explains why Lafayette Police Chief Ben Alldritt, who re-

lied on the Sigalert, did not issue a local Nixle notification. "But I will next time," Alldritt said. "It was a lesson learned by me about people's expectations."

Orinda officials also pledged to review their incident notification procedures. "We are aware of the issue, and the police chief and I are working on a way to better notify residents," said City Manager Steve Salomon.

Fire and medical responses in Lamorinda were not affected that day. The Contra Costa County Fire Protection District had no involvement with the incident, and the traffic had no impact on other responses that day, according to a district spokesman. And the Moraga-Orinda Fire District, the responding agency to the traffic accident, experienced no adverse impacts because of the congestion. "We always have the ability to respond," said MOFD Chief Dave Winnacker.

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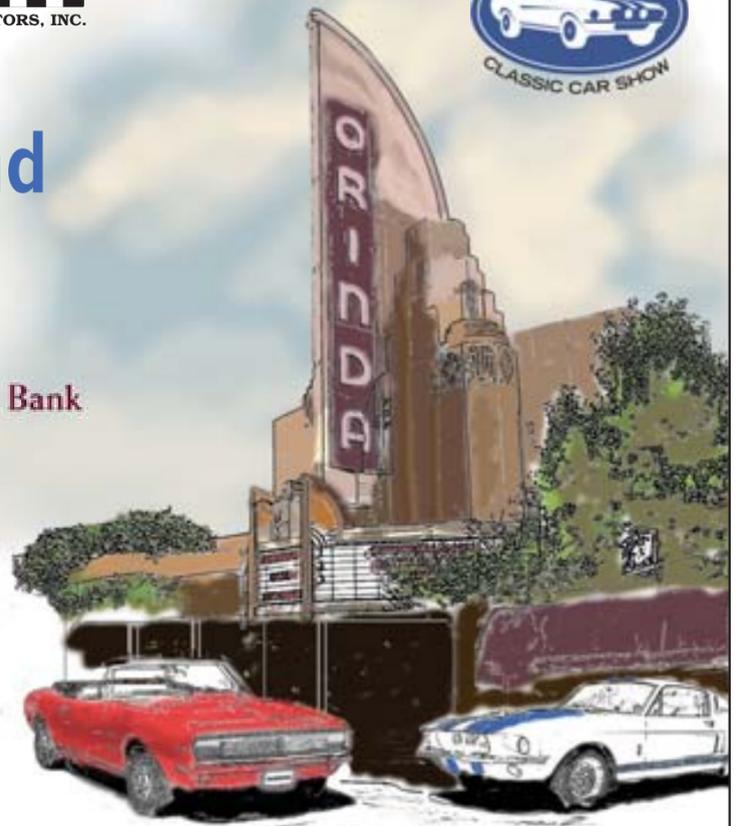
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