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Looking at Options to Improve Reliez Station Corridor

By Cathy Tyson



Reliez Station Corridor map Image provided

After personally seeing congestion, analyzing data and hearing from residents, representatives from Stantec Transportation Consultants explained at a late-January meeting various alternatives, with estimated price tags for each option, to the currently failing intersections along the Olympic Boulevard and Reliez Station Road Corridor. Feedback from residents at the forum was lively, with many voicing concerns.

The consultants were tasked to work with residents and staff to identify problems, and to develop and evaluate options for addressing issues on this well-traveled route toward the freeway, popular with Burton Valley drivers as well as residents of Moraga. The City of Lafayette received funding from the Contra Costa Transportation Authority to pay for a study of traffic and safety issues along the corridor. Stantec Traffic Consultants had the winning proposal.

With roughly \$1.2 million potentially available via county sales tax revenue to go toward upgrading intersections on the often-congested corridor, this was the first peek at potential solutions. Due to the number of problematic intersections along this route, and a limited amount of money, the city wants to get input from stakeholders and prioritize options.

The lengthy process started back in the spring of 2014 and included an initial opinion survey and multiple community walks along the corridor, identifying existing conditions and more.

At the January meeting, consultants presented exhaustive charts with issues identified by residents that rated characteristics like speed, congestion, safety and more at each of the four intersections along the route from the intersection of Pleasant Hill Road and Olympic Boulevard to Reliez Station Road and Glenside Drive North. Pros and cons of each alternative were laid out, along with estimated costs of each option. Consultants sought to gather input from residents about the alternatives; some were more popular than others.

The biggest intersection at Olympic Boulevard and Pleasant Hill Road features problems such as school traffic backups, right of way violations and pedestrian safety issues. Three alternative solutions were presented: a traffic signal, a roundabout, or doing nothing and leaving it as is.

One of the presenters pointed out that "the community repeatedly rejected" use of a traffic signal. The second alternative, a roundabout, was deemed an "eloquent solution" by the consultants, providing movement along with free right turns that will accommodate an abundant amount of traffic, while reducing speed and reducing delays at a low operating cost but a higher installation cost.

"There's not one silver bullet," said Paul Menaker, explaining that each intersection poses different problems and needs a unique solution. As the meeting wrapped up, residents were asked to put a red sticker on the alternative option that they preferred for each intersection.

City Engineer Tony Coe explained that changes could be phased in or put on hold until further funding becomes available.

Additional topics discussed included what to do about large trucks on these narrow, hilly streets. The goal is to improve signage to warn truck drivers ahead of time before they get onto Reliez Station Road so they have room to recalculate a more truck-friendly approach to their destination.

While most everyone at the meeting agreed there is room for improvement along the corridor, the challenging part will be selecting a solution, given existing budget constraints and differences of opinion. The entire presentation, including all of the alternatives and their respective costs can be viewed online at the city website (www.lovelafayette.org) under the Hot Topics tab. Going forward, the plan will be presented to the Circulation Commission for review, which will then recommend a course of action to the City Council.

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