

Published October 17th, 2018

St. Mary's Road roundabout project discussed with public

By Vera Kochan



Simulation of the two roundabouts as presented at the recent meeting. Photo Vera Kochan

Town representatives and project team members invited the public to attend another community informational meeting Sept. 27 at Saint Mary's College to hear updates regarding the St. Mary's Road and Rheem Boulevard/Bollinger Canyon Road roundabouts. The public was given a choice to attend a 4:30 p.m. or 6:30 p.m. presentation, both of which covered the same information.

The purpose of the meeting was to answer many of the questions and concerns collected from comment cards filled out by attendees from the July 2017, meeting. On hand to address the issues were Moraga Public Works Director/Town Engineer Edric Kwan, Moraga Chief of Police Jon King, Moraga Senior Civil Engineer and Project Manager Shawn Knapp, Kimley-Horn and Associates Consultant Project Manager John Pulliam, and Kimley-Horn, and Associate Consultant Roundabout Design Engineer Sean Houck.

The largest concerns the project team received from last year were regarding outreach, safety, alternatives and finance. The request for more public outreach and communication is what led to last month's update meeting. Safety questions about whether there are existing issues at these intersections were addressed, alternative intersection improvements instead of roundabouts were explored, and concerns about project costs were examined.

King discussed safety issues, noting that visibility was a major issue at the St. Mary's/Rheem intersection. The drop in road elevation momentarily leaves drivers wanting to turn left from Rheem Boulevard onto St. Mary's Road without a clear view of oncoming traffic. A collision at the current intersection is much more hazardous than a side-swipe at a roundabout. Drivers at the St. Mary's/Bollinger intersection often don't come to a complete stop before joining the flow of traffic, and there is potential for tragic results. "When you add to the mix pedestrians, joggers and bicyclers at both intersections," King said, "a roundabout will reduce collision points."

Alternatives studied included leaving the intersections as is, installing two large roundabouts at both intersections, installing traffic signals, or adding a large roundabout at St. Mary's/ Rheem with a mini-roundabout at St. Mary's/Bollinger. The roundabout/mini-roundabout concept showed a marked savings in safety cost, reduction of time spent waiting at intersections, reductions in operation and maintenance cost and a slight decrease in emissions. While the initial capital cost was slightly higher than other alternatives, the accumulated costs compared to all of the proposed alternatives was substantially lower over time.

At this point, funding from the Contra Costa Transportation Agency is \$450,000. Lamorinda Fee and Finance Authority is \$140,707. No Town General Funds will be used. The CCTA and LFFA funds can't be repurposed for a different project and the town will seek grant funds to complete the project. Project costs have been dropping since the early stages of the project in 2009, when options included a bridge over the creek near Bollinger (\$11 million) or two full-sized roundabouts (\$7 million). The latest incarnation of one full-sized roundabout and one mini roundabout (\$350,000 for final design and \$2.6 million to construct) ended the meeting on a positive note.

The project team plans to make its presentation to the city council on Oct. 24.

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