

Ground Breaking News: Moraga Road is Closed

By Sophie Braccini



7-ton pipes are set in a 10 foot deep trench Photo Sophie Braccini

Mountain Cascade and the East Bay Municipal Utility District (EBMUD) did it; on June 16th they closed Moraga Road to through traffic at 9:00 a.m. sharp, not to reopen until 5:30 p.m. Everything had been tested, every flagger had his spot, every foreman had his phone, every worker his instructions. Things proceeded smoothly, and when the first traffic difficulties emerged the two companies were reactive and flexible, and modified the system in place to minimize the impact on residents.

Mountain Cascade won the EBMUD bid to install the new pipeline on Moraga Road. “We are doing more than replacing the old distribution system,” explains EBMUD’s Nora Harlow, “the new transmission pipeline is in addition to the existing pipeline, which will continue to function: for security purposes there will be two transmission pipelines along the same general alignment.”

The project ends at Draeger Drive because EBMUD has a large reservoir up that road (Moraga Reservoir), which will be replaced in the near future. Before that happens, a reservoir will be built at Ardith Drive to provide water while the new Moraga Reservoir is constructed. This is all part of a comprehensive Water Treatment and Transmission Improvements Program, which will improve reliability of water service to Lamorinda and western Walnut Creek.

Harlow is the main contact person for all those who have issues with the project (510-220-4331). On Monday the 16th, her phone rang when people got stuck in traffic around 4 p.m. on St Mary’s Road, and wanted immediate help. One of the biggest intersections is St Mary’s with Glenside to the East (going toward Walnut Creek) and Woodview to the west. Mountain Cascade had stationed one of its most experienced flagger, Casey, at the corner. The young man says he likes his job, keeping traffic moving and being of real help to drivers.

When people started complaining about delays, EBMUD and Mountain Cascade were quick to react and a second flagger was sent to that intersection. “We keep testing and improving,” says Harlow. She personally travels the different routes to test the system. All of the flaggers have a walky-talky and a foreman is in charge of their management.

EBMUD hired a professional traffic consultant during the Environmental Impact Report (EIR) process, to perform detailed studies and provide recommendations for traffic control.

Traffic impact was only one of the systems studied, another big one is the emergency response scheme. “Every battalion chief in the area, including Walnut Creek, has a specific radio system to reach us at any time,” says Tony Batista, who is in charge of the project for Mountain Cascade. “Every foreman can be contacted instantaneously and the roads cleared in minutes.” The trench for the pipeline is dug for the most part on the side of the road to allow emergency vehicles to pass once the Mountain Cascade vehicles are moved out of the way. “We have tested the system,” confirms Moraga-Orinda Fire District (MOFD) Chief Pete Nowicki, “for non-emergency transport we’ll use the detour and for real emergencies we’ll be able to have the construction company clear the road while we are getting the victim.” MOFD has access to helicopter transportation if needed.

The same strategy of “moving out of the way quickly” applies to residents living in the construction area. “Everybody’s driveway has a steel plate ready to be put in place when someone needs to get in or out,” explains Batista, “we are moving slowly, 140 to 200 feet a day and we are talking to every neighbor as we approach their home.” The garbage company has agreed to come to the area before 9 a.m., while the postal service didn’t want to change their route and will be accompanied on site.

The summer will be long and hot for the workers, flaggers and residents of the area. There will be no vacation for Harlow this summer; she’s waiting for your phone call, and if you find that traffic is moving better than you anticipated, don’t hesitate to call her with a word of encouragement.



The intersection of St. Mary’s Road and Rheem Blvd.