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First BART Transbay Tube Closure Goes Smoothly

By Nick Marnell



Slow day for an eastbound BART train at the Orinda station Aug. 1. Photos Nick Marnell

ridership was maybe half of normal. Trains ran every 10 minutes, twice as frequently as on the regular weekend schedule.

The Orinda station also reported a low passenger count, with a misleading "No Service to San Francisco" sign taped onto the ticket machines, which probably did not help. "I didn't see similar signs at other stations. I'm sure it was confusing to riders," said Rebecca Saltzman, BART District 3 director.

Five passengers embarked at the Orinda station and traveled three stops to 19th Street in Oakland. "Look for the person in the green vest," announced the operator, and not only was there one person at the station to help, there were over a dozen. "Follow the blue arrows along the floor," they directed, as riders walked the few hundred feet to the station exit. The station was staffed with volunteers, supervisors and interpreters. Jim Allison, BART spokesman, also worked the station that morning. "Most everyone is rolling with the punches," he said. "They have been appreciative of the direction."

That certainly seemed to be the case. "The volunteers were wonderful," said Nancy Pinio of Lafayette, returning from San Francisco. "A volunteer even took my suitcase down the stairs for me so I wouldn't have to use the escalator."

Outside more volunteers and four BART police officers assisted riders. Shuttle buses from numerous Bay Area transportation agencies waited in line on 20th Street, departing every three minutes. Along West Grand they rode, up the dedicated bus ramp to the Bay Bridge. Traffic appeared to be normal, and the bus never stopped on the bridge during the 22-minute ride into San Francisco.

At the Transbay Terminal the volunteers - all BART employees, paid to work their off days - guided the riders to their destinations. "Two blocks to the Embarcadero station," they instructed. Pinio had commented that the walk between the terminal and the station was farther than she expected and she was right. That's a long two blocks along Main from the terminal to Market Street. Saltzman said that BART is working on ways to address that long walk in time for the Labor Day weekend, when the transbay tube will be closed again.

Fewer volunteers worked the San Francisco side than in Oakland, and the route back to the terminal bus stop from the Embarcadero was not as well posted, since the departing buses did not

After enduring an exasperating strike, equipment malfunctions and even a fallen tree that shut down the Pittsburg-Bay Point line and forced riders to detrain in Lafayette, Lamorinda's BART riders braced for more grief with the suspension of transbay service during the first weekend of August. BART chief mechanical officer Tamar Allen explained that the worn rails and more than 900 rotted wooden ties had to be replaced on the tracks between the West Oakland station and the transbay tube. BART arranged for shuttle buses to transport riders during the tube closure between the 19th Street station in Oakland and the Transbay Terminal in San Francisco, two blocks from Embarcadero station.

But the grief failed to materialize. Mid-morning Saturday, Aug. 1, the Lafayette BART station was nearly empty. "It's not as chaotic as I expected," said station agent Susan Ta, noting that

leave from the original drop off point. And the ticketing procedure between the bus and the station and back seemed to confuse riders.

The bus across the Bay Bridge to Oakland rolled without a hitch. BART spokeswoman Alicia Trost, appearing much more relaxed than when she updated bitter customers last year on the strike, patrolled the 19th Street station late that afternoon. As to any ticketing confusion, "This weekend is about helping out, and not so much about our revenue," she said.

"Glad to have you on board!" welcomed the operator on the train back to Orinda, the cars a bit more full than in the morning, but still emptier than on a normal Saturday. Trost said that 826 riders used the Orinda station over the construction weekend compared with 2,637 the weekend before, and that 1,183 used the Lafayette station as opposed to 3,406 the weekend prior.

"We have lots of riders from the Orinda, Moraga and Lafayette area who rely on BART to get to work or to head into the city for a Giants' game, dinner or shopping and we appreciate their support while we work to rebuild our aging system," she said.

Once the track maintenance in west Oakland is completed, it will be a while before riders are inconvenienced with this project again. "For 35 years, we should be okay," said Allen.

That many years between bouts of grief, BART riders can probably handle.

Reach the reporter at: info@lamorindaweekly.com

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