



## Fire Districts

### Public Meetings

#### Moraga-Orinda Fire District Board of Directors

Wednesday, Aug. 19, 7 p.m.  
Moraga Library Community Room  
1500 St. Mary's Road, Moraga  
For meeting times and agendas,  
visit [www.mofd.org](http://www.mofd.org)

#### ConFire Board of Directors

Tuesday, Aug. 18, 1:30 p.m.  
Board Chamber room 107,  
Administration Building,  
651 Pine St., Martinez  
For meeting times and agendas,  
visit <http://alturl.com/5p9pu>.

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## More Questions on Station 46

By Nick Marnell

Carman said he expects to discuss highlights of the proposed station 46 agreement with his board of directors at its Aug. 18 meeting. The Moraga-Orinda Fire District and the Contra Costa County Fire Protection District are in negotiations to build a new station 46 on Lorinda Lane at the Orinda-Lafayette border, to replace aging MOFD station 43 and ConFire station 16, which closed nearly three years ago.

Operational questions were directed to MOFD chief Stephen Healy and ConFire chief Jeff Carman, and the answer most requested was how the response times for north Orinda will be affected based on the location of the new station.

Healy said that the response time

data was being crunched under the direction of geographic information system expert John Radke, and that his report will be made public at district workshops that will be scheduled if the ConFire board approves the station 46 agreement.

MOFD board president Alex Evans answered the financial questions, mostly about teaming with ConFire, which is going through a difficult financial period. "ConFire is a bad partner," said an audience member.

"No they're not," said Evans. "In October 2013, we almost ran out of cash. We can't afford what we're doing now, and I have to find ways to improve that." Evans said that the district has \$70 million in debt and li-

abilities and he has to find some way to make the district sustainable. Either raise money, or cut expenses, he said, explaining that the long-term savings to MOFD in the station 46 venture with ConFire will be at least \$1 million per year.

Evans said that as a board member, he has to think not only of benefits to Orinda but of benefits to the entire district. "It's not how far it is from station 43 to 46. It's how far from station 46 it is to everywhere else," he said.

As to taxing residents for heightened fire service, or an additional station, Evans said that after two failures in Orinda of a bond and a sales tax measure, it seemed unlikely that the district could secure the two-thirds

majority vote necessary for passage of a parcel tax.

"If this doesn't work out, we will have to do something worse," he said, hinting that the only realistic way the district can save money is to reduce the number of firefighters.

"Give me a bunch of bad choices, and let me pick the one that will hurt the least," he said. "I'll never come up with something that everyone will love."

Carman said he expects to discuss highlights of the proposed station 46 agreement with his board of directors at its Aug. 18 meeting. The board asked the chief to also present updated information on the benefits to ConFire of the jointly operated station.

## First BART Transbay Tube Closure Goes Smoothly

### Second closure planned for Labor Day

By Nick Marnell

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 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.



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

Photos Nick Marnell

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 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.



Maybe one sign BART can eliminate for Labor Day weekend.

## Worst Fire Season Ever?

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"Brush, grass and landscaping, as well as outbuildings, were threatened, including occupied residences," said Cal Fire division chief Jim Crawford.

The arson investigation is ongoing, and officials would not confirm that either the Natalie Drive fire or the Deer Hill Road fire were the doings of Wilson.

Earlier this year, ConFire chief Jeff Carman predicted that this fire season was going to be catastrophic. "I think we're seeing that in so many ways, most notably fire spread," he said. "I just keep holding my breath that we don't lose any firefighters."

With 11,000 firefighters battling 19 active California wildfires in early August, and two firefighters killed while in action, catastrophic may be too mild an adjective to describe what lies ahead. MOFD engine parked in neighborhood driveway during wildfire attack July 30

Photo courtesy MOFD

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