

Published August 12th, 2015

The Summer of Road Construction

By Chris Lavin



Vic Ryerson sits with his two enraptured grandsons as they watch construction vehicles at work on Ivy Drive in Orinda. Photo Margie Ryerson

crews had a problem and had to work longer than expected, right through rush hour.

"People do get frustrated," said Tonya Gilmore, assistant to the city manager in Orinda. "But public works tries to plan construction work so that it disrupts the fewest number of people." Summer seems the best time, she said. School is out, and because only a few corridors in Lamorinda feed to the schools, summer is the time to fix the roads and build sidewalks. But she recognizes that in the summer "more people are out during the day," she said. There are swim clubs, for instance, and drivers can get caught up in backups when meets and practices are under way. "It can get congested," she said.

A particularly troublesome spot this summer has been along Moraga Way near Glorietta, where workers had traffic stopped in one direction for the entire day, flaggers in place.

In mid-July Orinda city officials met with PG&E representatives to encourage them to try to complete work in a less disruptive manner. Work is scheduled for only Saturdays for the rest of the summer, according to the city website. The utility has replaced more than 1,200 copper lines with piping "that is more resistant to corrosion and earthquakes," according to a PG&E press release. Luckily there are only 25 lines to go.

Mt. Diablo Boulevard in Lafayette also has had numerous pile-ups and diversions as median work continues.

"It's frustrating," said Orinda's Gilmore in the city manager's office. But at least the kids in the back seat will be amused, as they wait.

Cherry pickers hoisted to trim trees, pavers laying asphalt, giant drums tamping it down, backhoes tearing through pavement - big trucks are everywhere, it seems, becoming the bane of a driver's existence. Except to the 3-year-olds who ogle even a garbage truck from their car seats in the back.

"There is a certain fascination with earth-moving equipment," said Shelby O'Conner in Moraga, who was wending her way through Safeway pushing one of those big shopping carts with the faux car on the front, her toddler steering. "And garbage trucks."

This summer seems to have become the perfect storm of road construction projects: Paving and pipes and the burying of new lines have delayed traffic throughout Lamorinda, causing backups, traffic delays, and frayed nerves.

In mid-July it got particularly bad in Orinda along Moraga Way, when traffic got stopped because of a PG&E gas service line project. The



Construction equipment on Rheem Boulevard in Moraga has drivers seeing double through their windshields. Photo Chris Lavin

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