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## Reliez Valley residents may soon resort to protests over congestion

By Pippa Fisher



Residents are determined to make their point. The Circulation Commission listens to multiple speakers talk about the congestion on Reliez Valley Road. Photos Gint Federas

With louder and more insistent voices, north Lafayette residents are demanding solutions to their everyday frustrations of congestion along Reliez Valley Road. At the end of their tether, the residents are now threatening protests, sit-outs and picketing in their efforts to get heard. And they want state Sen. Steve Glazier to get involved.

In a packed Dec. 4 Circulation Commission meeting, the audience and commission heard from 24 mostly north Lafayette residents who complained of long commutes to schools, frequent "tardies" for their children and diminishing home values because of the solid traffic between 7 and 8 a.m. every weekday.

As a result, Circulation Commissioner Carl Di Giorgio will be reaching out to Reliez Valley residents to discuss and listen to their ideas on congestion solutions in the Reliez Valley corridor, while city staff continue to meet with their counterparts from the neighboring jurisdictions of Contra Costa County and Pleasant Hill.

Not all residents think this is enough. "This has been a frustrating process," says Kristen Altbaum, cofounder of the group Reliez Valley Residents for Reduced Traffic. "No one seems to be truly advocating for our fair and reasonable request which is simply to protect residential Reliez Valley Road and the school bus route, by way of restricted access signs from 7 to 8:30 a.m., and improve efficiencies at the Pleasant Hill Road/Deerhill intersection so all Lafayette/Acalanes district kids can access schools efficiently and reliably and not at the expense of our regional neighbors. Why is that so difficult?"

For most of the speakers at the meeting, the answers were clear - applicable to the morning commute hours they want "No Left Turn" signs at Reliez Valley Road/Grayson Road, as well as "No Right Turn" at Taylor Boulevard/Gloria Terrace, and Taylor Boulevard/Withers Avenue to prevent out-of-area traffic from cutting through and to prevent apps such as WAZE and Google from directing out-of-town drivers along their road.

Residents do not want metering lights at Withers Avenue/Reliez Valley Road, an idea proposed by city staff, which they say will penalize those Lafayette residents living north of Withers Avenue in the unincorporated area.

"It is shocking the city staff suggested metering lights at the intersection of Withers Avenue and Reliez Valley Road," said Lafayette resident and co-founder of RVRRT Roger Chelemedos after the meeting. "They know that will make commutes to school even worse for many of our students at Acalanes, Stanley Middle School and Springhill Elementary, including our school buses. They understand this will divide our city and could lead to negative funding consequences for our schools. They just don't care about our schools or reasonable morning access to them. Shocking."

The problem with restricted turn signs at the above locations, is that they lie in unincorporated Lafayette and, say city staff who have been meeting with their counterparts in the neighboring jurisdictions, Pleasant Hill and Contra Costa County are not prepared to try such restrictions without a detailed study of impacts to upstream traffic within their jurisdictions.

Additionally the residents spoke again of lengthening the right turn lane at Pleasant Hill Road and Deerhill Road along with the left turn lane onto Stanley Boulevard in front of Acalanes High School, which they claim would significantly keep traffic moving at the "funnel" end of the corridor. City staff once again pointed to studies that it had done last year on the intersection, which they say showed negligible benefits for traffic.

Many of the speakers did not approve of the recently installed trial stop signs, which were brought in to address the separate safety issue of speeding, saying that those signs serve only to further slow down the crawl of traffic in the morning commute.

The Circulation Commission will hear back from commissioner Di Giorgio in January and at that time hopes to send a prioritized list of the residents' input on traffic calming solutions to the city council although as commissioner Adrian Levy pointed out, they have already heard multiple times what the community wants.

Altbaum says in an email to a school board member that RVRRT will be advocating for maximum momentum. "We'll be protesting and keeping our K-8 kids out of school on Jan. 16, the first of perhaps many sit-out days, to picket along Reliez Valley Road, and at city offices, and at Sen. Glazier's Orinda office," although she notes that if Glazier gets involved to facilitate cooperation between jurisdictions, and foster support for restrictive access ahead of the sit-out school date, they would gladly cancel the protest.

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