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Delay preferred to residential encroachment for major road repairs

By Sora O'Doherty



Severe backups plagued Orchard Road last August during EBMUD road repairs and a resulting detour. Photo Sora O'Doherty

of up to 20 minutes per one-way trip; requiring all work to be performed at night and/or on weekends; or while not specifically detouring traffic, to specifically not cause detours through residential streets.

Safety was the council's primary concern, and the number of cars that would be diverted onto residential streets, and the speed at which such cars travel, raise significant safety concerns. Similarly, working at night increases the possibility of industrial accidents, as well as raising issues of excessive noise and light in the areas adjacent to the work. Tom Guarino from PG&E and Emily Barnett of Contra Costa Central Sanitary District attested to the fact that night work causes increased costs, which then must be passed through to consumers. Additionally, Barnett pointed out that it is very difficult to get asphalt and concrete delivered at night. No one from EBMUD, which was responsible for the work last August, attended the meeting.

Nevertheless, the council acknowledged that each situation is different, and there needs to be flexibility in dealing with each case individually. Vice Mayor Inga Miller pointed out that people who live on major roads already suffer with traffic and noise during the day, and thought it would be unfair to impose night work on them. Council Member Darlene Gee characterized what happened last year on Orchard Road as a travesty and Council Member Dean Orr said no one wants a repeat performance. Mayor Amy Worth said that the utilities must provide resources for enforcement of traffic controls and Director of Public Works Larry Thies suggested that the city should consider imposing penalties, short of pulling encroachment permits, for violations. Council Member Eve Phillips raised concerns about how to prevent motorists from diverting onto residential streets in the absence of official detours. Everyone agreed that better communications prior to and during repairs are essential, including notification to residents along the road and signage alerting vehicles using the road to upcoming roadwork.

Staff will return to the council with a proposed policy in the future, and it was clarified that such a policy will not affect emergency road repairs.

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