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Safety measures to stay in place on Reliez Valley Road

By Pippa Fisher



The new stop sign at Fairholm Road is one of five measures that will become permanent, in an attempt to deter speeders. Photo Pippa Fisher

Valley Road.

Police Chief Eric Christensen gave his report at the city council's Feb. 12 meeting and recommended making all measures permanent.

Christensen said that the four-week speed enforcement campaign by his officers that accompanied these measures had proved successful in helping to change driver behaviors and he noted that another such campaign would start again soon.

In response to questions about the possibility of speed bumps, Christensen said he was not keen to use them on an arterial, 30 mile per hour road, saying that cars hitting the bumps at such speeds can be dangerous. He is however, supportive of installing a speed feedback sign capable of recording speeds to help with their surveys.

Members of the public who spoke were generally in favor of the new measures but several urged the council not to forget the matter of congestion. Several speakers made the point that there are always less cars on the road at this time of year and that traffic will build up again, so data is needed for the whole year.

As the council voted unanimously to make the safety measures permanent and add a speed feedback sign on a temporary basis, Mayor Don Tatzin stressed the importance of continuing to work at the county level to be supportive of Reliez Valley Residents for Reduced Traffic's requests for turn restriction signs on Taylor Boulevard. A meeting is scheduled this week between city staff, RVRRT and Supervisor Federal Glover to discuss turn restriction signs in the area that lies beyond Lafayette's jurisdiction, which residents say are needed at peak commute hours to prevent apps such as Waze from directing traffic through their neighborhood.

Reliez Valley Road resident Kristen Altbaum points out that neighbors have received a letter from the Contra Costa County Fire Protection District stating that during a high wind event, the combination of high traffic congestion from commuters and potential evacuee traffic could make response to the area very difficult for fire resources.

The letter continues, "The Contra Costa County Fire Protection District is supportive of all solutions that would improve the quality of life for the residents along Reliez Valley Road. We do not feel that doing nothing is a viable solution."

Given that, Altbaum says that RVRRT looks forward to immediate action being taken by Glover "to protect this high fire danger corridor, as it is listed on Cal Fire's Hazard Severity Zone Map, from the onslaught of out-of-area commuters and approve limited access signs from 7-8:30 (a.m.) Monday through Friday, as is already standard in many neighborhoods within the county who have protected themselves against significant Waze traffic," she says.

"We also hope and expect Lafayette city would advocate for this outcome on our behalf," adds Altbaum.

Lafayette is making permanent the safety improvements along Reliez Valley Road.

And it does seem that wheels are spinning a little more freely there these days, but is that as a result of a seasonal reduction, as many of the corridor's residents suggest, or has it been helped by safety precautions implemented in November?

The problems along Reliez Valley Road are twofold: severe congestion during the morning commute hours and drivers traveling at unsafe speeds at other times.

To address the issue of speeding, the city implemented five temporary measures: the painting of "30" on the road at locations where a speed limit sign has been posted, a "No right turn" sign at the island at the intersection of Pleasant Hill Road and Reliez Valley Road, two additional stop signs - one at Fairholm Road and the other at My Road - and a marked crosswalk at Green

Reliez Valley Road resident Roger Chelemedos says it is unconscionable that Waze, Google and other traffic mapping apps would continue to direct traffic down a narrow and windy road, "which could result in first responders being unable to provide urgent medical care to residents along the Reliez Valley Road corridor, resulting in a loss of life, or cause a situation where residents would not be able to evacuate their homes in the event of a firestorm, as recently occurred in Santa Rosa, Napa and Sonoma."

Christensen says he is happy with the changes he has seen regarding safety and reduced speeding. Now residents say it is time to focus on traffic mitigation.

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