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## Decongestion ahead for major Lafayette intersection

By Nick Marnell



Traffic crawls along Moraga Road before the intersection with Mt. Diablo Boulevard. Photo Nick Marnell

Drivers planning to turn right onto Mt. Diablo Boulevard from Moraga Road will soon have an added option as the Lafayette City Council unanimously authorized the temporary addition of a second northbound, right-turn lane at the intersection. The pilot project, part of the Lafayette Downtown Congestion Reduction Plan, will commence in August and run for 90 days.

According to a city staff report, approximately 200 feet prior to reaching Mt. Diablo Boulevard on the northbound approach, Moraga Road expands from two to three lanes. Each of the three lanes indicates permissible movements of either left turn only, left turn and through, or right turn only. The city will modify the center lane marking by adding a permissible right turn arrow.

The program will also affect the Mt. Diablo Boulevard and First Street intersection. To discourage drivers from weaving between the eastbound lanes of Mt. Diablo Boulevard as they head toward Highway 24, the city will

modify half of the existing solid-striped eastbound turn lanes with a broken line, allowing adequate space for freeway-bound drivers to merge from the two right-turn lanes at Moraga Road. A similar traffic pattern exists at the off-ramp of Interstate 680 onto Ygnacio Valley Road in Walnut Creek, where drivers navigate two right-turn lanes in order to make a left turn onto California Boulevard a short distance ahead.

For pedestrians, crossing Mt. Diablo Boulevard at the eastern side of the Moraga Road intersection will be prohibited during the 90-day project.

The May 14 presentation by James Hinkamp, city transportation planner, answered most of the questions of the council members, except for options available for pedestrians who regularly use the intersection. "How many of them are there, and what happens to their travel time?" asked Mayor Don Tatzin, who stressed that the needs of pedestrians should not be ignored while the city institutes projects that shorten vehicle driving times. Information on pedestrian behavior will be accumulated during the program, Hinkamp said.

Because of the PG&E closure of St. Mary's Road in Lafayette over the summer, likely resulting in added pressure on Moraga Road into the city, the council urged Hinkamp to start the project in June or July, if at all possible.

"It depends on the availability of signal technology," Hinkamp said later. The city needs to acquire controller cabinets - the brains of the system - and an overhead video detection system, which times the traffic signals and collects traffic-count data. And Hinkamp would have to find an available contractor to install the equipment.

"If we can lock in an order and receive all the equipment by June or July, we'll be able to start the project earlier," Hinkamp said. He estimated the program will cost \$75,000, paid for through the state Traffic Congestion and Relief Fund and Contra Costa County Measure J.

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