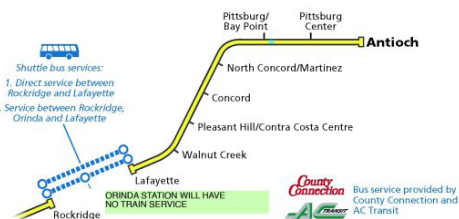




Published May 13th, 2020

BART begins critical rail replacement near Orinda Station

By Sora O'Doherty



Bay Area Rapid Transit has begun weekend closure of the Orinda BART station in order to upgrade rails. In many cases, the critical track components to be replaced date back to when BART first began service on its main Contra Costa line in 1973. BART crews will work around the clock on shutdown weekends to replace critical railway components. The project, which is being conducted to the safety of passengers and staff, has been designated as an essential public works project in the Contra Costa public health orders on the novel coronavirus.

The first weekend shutdown was May 9-10. The station will be closed for four additional weekends, including the Memorial Day weekend, May 23-25, the weekends of June 6-7 and 20-21, as well as Saturday, July 4 and the following Sunday. Free buses will replace trains on those weekends but riders should expect delays of 20 to 25

minutes.

The work will also require temporary, late night and early morning lane closures of Highway 24 in Orinda to make way for construction equipment, but will not require weekend daytime lane closures on Highway 24 as was needed last year for BART work in Lafayette. Periodic overnight lane closures in Orinda began in mid-April. These overnight lane closures will involve no more than two lanes and are expected to have minimal impact on Highway 24 drivers.

BART reports that it is making gains on capital work during the stay-at-home order. The utility closely examined the possibility of moving up the track shutdown weekends to minimize impacts to the public, but it wasn't possible as needed materials could not be acquired ahead of the previously-set schedule. Workers and contractors will follow social distancing guidelines established for all critical infrastructure projects that are allowed to proceed under state and regional stay-at-home orders.

Extremely low ridership and the new 9 p.m. service closure are allowing new opportunities for progress on capital projects. Capital projects are not paid for by operating funds, which means the huge revenue loss from the ridership decline isn't delaying infrastructure work. Many capital projects, such as the Orinda rail replacement project, are supported by Measure RR, which was approved by BART District voters in 2016. The bond measure provides BART with \$3.5 billion in funding for infrastructure work.

Project highlights include replacing four track switches that are at the end of their useful lives. These are large track components that can measure up to 200 feet in length and allow trains to move from line to line. In addition, BART will install approximately 3,000 feet of new rail and replace approximately 300 badly worn wooden ties with longer-lasting, concrete ones; 600 to 800 tons of rock ballast will also be replaced, which is essential for stabilizing the rail. Once the project is completed, BART expects customers to experience a more comfortable ride and trains will be quieter for riders and neighbors.

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