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## 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.

## MOFD board declines to fully staff ambulance in downtown Orinda



Photo courtesy MOFD

By Nick Marnell

A split Moraga-Orinda Fire District board rejected a staffing model that would have placed a fully staffed ambulance at Fire Station 45 in Orinda, instead voting to maintain the cross-staffing model in use since 2013.

Station 41 in Moraga and Station 45 deploy both an ambulance and a fire engine on site. Station 41 fully staffs each vehicle, with a crew of three on the engine and a two-person crew for Medic 41.

It doesn't work that way at Station 45. The station maintains only a three-person crew which responds on either the engine of the ambulance, whichever is dispatched. When Medic 45 is off to a medical call, Engine 45 sits idle at the station.

According to a district staff report, when Medic 45 is out of the district, a call for service in Station 45's coverage area requires a response from either Engine 43 or Truck 44, which can result in extended response times as those units travel farther to the scene of the

incident.

"I truly do not understand why we would not have staff personnel at Station 45 at all times," said Director Greg Baitx, who at the April 29 district meeting made the motion to fully staff the Orinda ambulance.

From 2007 until 2013, the ambulance at Station 45 was fully staffed. Then came the financial crisis, and the district reverted to the cross-staff model. "When our financial situation improved, those positions were to be restored," President Steven Danziger said.

But they weren't, despite the district's securing a federal grant for that purpose. Instead, the district used the grant money for floaters to cover sick days and vacation relief, permitted uses of the federal funds.

To fully staff Medic 45, the district would have to hire six additional personnel at a cost of \$1.44 million per year, or MOFD could cover the ambulance with increased overtime of approximately \$1 million.

Danziger and Director Michael Donner have long pushed for the fully staffed Orinda ambulance, but at the district meeting, their support waned, largely because of the unknown financial impact of the coronavirus pandemic. "I don't think it would be prudent for us to increase staffing now," Donner said.

"I intended to fully support increased staffing, but right now I feel it would not be responsible to direct the chief to do it," Danziger said. "In my heart, I want to do it, and if things were different I'd be right there with Director Baitx."

The motion to fully staff Medic 45 was rejected by the board 3-1, with Baitx voting yes and Danziger abstaining.

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