

Dumbarton Bridge lanes to be closed for earthquake retrofit

Gary Richards, Bay Area News Group, 2-1-11

Motorists who cross the Dumbarton Bridge at night or early in the morning may want to consider another way.

Because of seismic retrofit work that began Monday night on the six-lane span, two lanes each way will be closed overnight this week -- and probably on a similar schedule through August 2012.

Lanes will be coned off from 8 or 9 p.m. until 5 a.m. weekdays. On Fridays and weekends, the closings could last until 11 a.m.

The retrofit will provide drivers with a bridge that should withstand a major earthquake. And it is noteworthy for what it won't cost. The estimate now is \$149 million -- down from initial projections of \$365 million.

Construction bids came in nearly \$50 million lower, and there is less work in the water required than originally estimated, accounting for the \$216 million reduction.

Even though work is being done when traffic is very light, delays should be expected.

"I would not expect the closures to contribute to congestion," said John Goodwin, a spokesman for the Metropolitan Transportation Commission. "But the presence of traffic cones and workers makes it imperative that drivers do two simple things: Pay attention, and obey the posted speed limit."

Drivers say they will take no chances.

"Only one lane will be open?" asked Melinda Spencer of Fremont, who often comes home at night after caring for her elderly parents in Menlo Park. "What do you suggest I do?"

The San Mateo Bridge a few miles to the north is one option, but work at the Highway 92-Interstate 880 interchange east of the bridge can produce backups throughout the night.

Highway 237 between Mountain View and Milpitas is another alternative.

Another option is sticking to the Dumbarton and leaving a little later, when traffic thins out.

"That may be my best choice," Spencer said.

The biggest impact will come during Memorial Day and Labor Day weekends, when the bridge will be closed for 79 hours.

The toll authority raised vehicle tolls on all its bridges by \$1 to \$5 last summer, in part to fund retrofit projects for the Dumbarton and Antioch bridges. Both have been deemed to be at risk in the event of a big earthquake. The \$130 million Antioch retrofit began in June and is expected to be completed in May 2012.

On the Dumbarton, crews will be reinforcing the existing concrete slab bridge and replacing major deck joints.

The bridge serves about 61,000 vehicles per day. The first Dumbarton Bridge opened in 1927, then was replaced by the current 1.6-mile-long span in 1982.