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Warm Springs transit, utility projects underway as BART plan progresses in Fremont

By Aliyah Mohammed



City of Fremont is working in collaboration with the Bay Area Rapid Transit District, Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority and San Francisco Public Utilities Commission on three key projects in Warm Springs all part of a regional water and transit infrastructure program totaling nearly \$8 billion.

The three sites, which have been a hive of activity, include the \$78 million in seismic upgrades being done on the Bay Division Pipelines No. 3 and 4 on the Hayward Fault; \$150 million in improvements on the Mission Boulevard/Warren Avenue area; and construction of the \$90-million Warm Springs/South Fremont BART station.

The seismic upgrade on two pipelines is ongoing in the areas adjacent to the Interstate 680 on- and off-ramps along Mission Boulevard, a project meant to ensure the continued delivery of water from the Hetch Hetchy Reservoir in case of a major earthquake.

The pipelines bring 20 percent of Fremont residents' water from Hetch Hetchy in Yosemite. They are being retrofitted given the close proximity to the seismically-active Hayward Fault. The new pipes are enclosed in a segmented box that is supposed to rotate when hit with seismic waves without damaging the pipes enclosed within it.

The newer pipes are designed to withstand up to 6.5 feet of displacement during an earthquake. The pipes can remain functional even when moved along, according to San Francisco Public Utilities Commission Infrastructure Director Julie Labonte.

"The current system serves 2.6 million water drinkers," Labonte said. "The current pipes have some years on them, so the pipes are being upgraded so water can be delivered within 24 to 72 hours of an earthquake to water drinkers."

The last five major seismic events have been separated by 104 years, so if the patterns hold there will be a big earthquake next year, Labonte said.

"This is a race against time," she added. "A rebuilding of an infrastructure a century old is a challenge, especially with all the businesses and other infrastructure around the area."

That project will be ongoing through the end of 2014, and will result in night closures on the northbound I-680 ramp near Mission Boulevard. Construction of this project began June 5, with 20 night closures planned from midnight to 5 a.m.

-VTA is building new bridges along the area of Mission Boulevard and Warren Avenue between Interstate 880 and Warm Springs Boulevard. The project, meant to span a widened Mission Boulevard and trenched Warren Avenue, will separate the future BART system from roadways in order to increase safety and decrease traffic congestion.

A single-lane bridge is being built for maintenance to allow access to the Union Pacific Railroad freight site. Two tracks are being built for the Warm Springs BART Station and two additional tracks are being built for the freight trains, VTA spokesperson Brent Pearse said.

"This allows BART and freight to run without running into each other or into automobiles or other modes of transportation," Pearse said. "This is better because it will decrease traffic congestion."

Since the Warren/Mission improvement project construction began June 17, almost all the asphalt has been ground down to prepare for excavation, and the ground will be depressed even further once the tracks are laid out, Pearse said.

Warren Avenue was closed last week as part of this improvement project, and will remain closed for the next year, BART Silicon Valley Communications Director Bernice Alaniz said.

"This is one of 11 ongoing grade separation the VTA is working; they are currently working on four out of five of the 11 planned grade separations," Alaniz said. "We will begin work on Dixon Landing in July, and unlike Warren we won't have to completely close Dixon down, but it will be down to one lane going either way."

The project is expected to be completed by 2015, in enough time so the focus can shift to the Berryessa BART station in North San Jose. Construction on it is slated to be completed in 2017.

The detours that have been routed to direct drivers away from construction is only a five to 10 minute adjustment for most people, Pearse said, so they should not cause too much of a disruption for people commuting to work.

-Another site that is rapidly rising is the Warm Springs BART Station, where an entire portion of the aerial track is already up. The work is continuing between I-880 and I-680 east of Mission Boulevard. The onsite communications tower will also serve the Berryessa BART Extension when it is built, and was jointly funded, according to Pearse.

The \$890-million project was fully funded locally; no federal money is going into this station, BART District Six Director Tom Blalock said.

The station is expected to have 2,000 parking spots, and solar panels that will produce 700 kilowatts of electricity enough to manage the station that will go back to the city grid, Blalock said. Additionally, BART is in the midst of talks with electric car companies to install electric car fueling stations at the Warm Springs station.

"We are putting in conduits pipes that go into the ground and have electrical cable run through them in anticipation of this," Paul Medved, Warm Springs BART project manager, said.

Fremont Mayor Bill Harrison said these projects are an example of organizations working together for the economic vitality of the city, by making Warm Springs an innovation hub.

The mayor added the Warm Springs area is expected to see an increase of 12,000 jobs and 29,000 housing units in coming years. He said this makes it an ideal time for improving and expanding infrastructure and public transportation.

"When organizations work together, and the dust settles, the public wins," Harrison said