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With the New Year, we have seen a lot of rain! While it has been helpful to address several years of drought, it has been hard on road conditions. With heavy and consistent rain, Marin has faced downed trees, mud slides, road closures and flooding. Of great significance to many Novato residents have been the three (three as of writing this!), multi-day closures of Highway 37 between Atherton Avenue and Highway 101. I know the tremendous traffic impact these closures have had on the Black Point, Green Point and Atherton neighborhoods.

So what is the problem? In short, high tides combined with heavy and consistent rain on a low roadway. In a more detailed explanation from our experts in Marin County Flood Control, here is the scoop:

The Novato Creek Watershed drains 45 square miles of land on its way to the San Pablo Bay and there are many tributaries that flow into Novato Creek. During storms, the hillsides of the watershed become saturated, and the stormwater flows in to the tidally influenced Novato baylands. The area is bisected by railroad tracks and Highway 37, and the waterway needs to flow under the Caltrans highway bridge. The higher water levels from the runoff can linger even after a storm has passed, especially when the flow is met by higher bay tides. During times of intense rain and/or high tides, the floodwater entering Novato Creek often exceeds the flow capacity of the existing highway bridge and then has nowhere to go but up onto the roadway. This has become worse over the years as the roadway has sunken due to the fact that it was built on top of soft, bay mud. Some stretches of the roadway have dropped as much as two feet. Furthermore, sea-level rise is predicted to increase 36-66 inches by 2100, therefore the situation with Highway 37 will continue to worsen in the coming years if left unaddressed.

Unfortunately, there is not an easy solution.

Caltrans and the County are working together to explore and identify opportunities to improve flooding conditions in this corridor. Caltrans is moving forward with a short term strategy that includes building up the existing roadway, building a water level safety barrier, culvert improvements, and improved pump activity. These interim fixes will greatly improve the conditions for the portion of roadway that has been experiencing flooding. Caltrans' estimated cost for these fixes is \$8 million. I am working with our State elected and transportation officials to lobby for this funding with hopes that the project can be completed this year. The County's Novato Watershed program has identified options to widen Novato Creek and set back levees, which combined with road work improvements on Highway 37 should help alleviate some of the conditions we have seen. These projects are in the conceptual design stages and will require additional funds to construct, but in good news, the County has secured a \$2.2 million grant that is being used towards designing some of these projects, which will help us leverage additional funding to move them forward.

A regional planning effort is also underway to implement a long term solution for improvements along the entire Highway 37 corridor – ultimately raising the entire roadway. Representatives from Marin County (including myself), Napa County, Solano County and Sonoma County formed a "Highway 37 Policy Committee" and have been meeting regularly for the past year. This committee is working to define and identify corridor concept alternatives, obtain funding and begin environmental review. These committee meetings are open to the public and noticed through the Transportation Authority of Marin's website. One "benefit" of the recent flooding on Highway 37 in Novato is that it has highlighted to our regional partners the significance and importance of this segment of the overall larger corridor project.

I understand the impact the Highway 37 road closures have had for the adjacent Novato neighborhoods as well as commuters. Maintaining and improving conditions on Highway 37 is of critical importance both locally and regionally, and I will actively continue to work on long and short term solutions.

Unfortunately, this winter we are likely to see additional closures as more King Tides and rain are predicted. I will continue to work with our local law enforcement and public works officials to ensure that adequate traffic control and signage is installed if future closures do occur to make the negative impacts as minimal as possible.