

## COUNTY

# Project plagued by late starts

◆ **Diamond Drive traffic delays lead to contract friction**

**MANDY MARKSTEINER**

*Special to the Monitor*

County Public Works Director Kyle Zimmermann estimated that the Diamond Drive Phase III Project is 16 days behind schedule. As a result, cold weather may prevent finishing the final step, which would add an "open grade friction course," a treatment that helps tres grip the road and reduces the risk of hydroplaning.

At a County Council Work Session in White Rock Tuesday night, Zimmermann said there were several reasons for the delays: the contractor was slow to get started; there were unexpected traffic control problems; the contractor didn't anticipate the complexity of the underground utility system (because Los Alamitos was originally going to be a temporary town, there were a lot of abandoned utilities underground); they had high rainfall during their working period; the contractor fired 11 people for a safety violation; and there were a few instances of vandalism.

Zimmermann hoped to avoid schedule-related problems by imposing a rule that future contractors must begin the project within a set time frame after the contract has been signed and by establishing progress milestones at the beginning of a project. But, he noted, the problem is that when he sets up restrictions, the price

[www.lamonitor.com](http://www.lamonitor.com)

## PROJECT

*From Page 1*

goes up.

The contractor has asked for \$180,000 in additional compensation, and so far the department has approved \$118,000.

The contractor has asked for 33 days to complete the project, but the Public Works Department has approved 16 days, which means the "substantial completion date" will be Oct. 24 and the "final completion date" will be Nov. 23.

Council's concerns focused on the impact on community traffic.

Councilor Robert Gibson said that he thought there was a requirement that only one road be closed at a time, "... but it seems to me we've been doing more than that which is why we've gotten the backups."

Gibson said last year there was a problem with left turns and so traffic engineers should have taken the issue into consideration. He asked Zimmermann, "is there traffic engineering taking place here?" and "was there any modeling of the traffic flow?"

Zimmermann said that they had done traffic modeling, but said, "We had no way of guessing that traffic would try to take a shortcut on Sycamore."

Gibson said that there was language in the original agreement that said the contractor would be fined if citizens were delayed more than ten minutes and asked why the engineers didn't consider the extensive delays in traffic, both in peak and non-peak hours for three weeks in August, to be a 10-minute delay.

Zimmermann said, "When we made the contract, our intent was it had to be something the contractor was doing deliberately. I believe these things were outside the contractor's control."

Council Chair Michael Wheeler said that the council should take responsibility for the traffic choke points, "because we've done nothing for 30 years to provide alternative routes. We've been through this three years in a row and it simply isn't working. We're going to have considerable discussion about how we do Phase IV."

He urged the administrators to "look at this project through new eyes, recognizing that this is the only road for 18,000 people to get to and from work every day."

Zimmermann said that they could avoid many conflicts that delay work by knowing ahead of time where the gas lines and other utilities are, both horizontally and vertically.

Tom Roach, the pavement division manager, said, "When you're digging a trench you don't know what you're going to find. They spent 11 days, after they figured out where everything was, putting the utilities in."

Zimmermann and Roach were asked if they wanted to use the same contractor for Phase IV.

Zimmermann said, "They're doing a quality job, but they're not making changes to meet the schedule."

Roach said that this was typical of the way public sector jobs are completed.

He said, "If this were the private sector, if they acted like this, they might not get to bid on future jobs."

See **PROJECT**, 3