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Motorists to say bye-bye to traffic lights at roundabout intersection

By KELLY NIX

DRIVERS TRAVELING through the intersection of highways 1 and 68 will start to learn what it will be like to drive through the completed roundabout when crews remove the traffic signals next week.

Beginning the morning of May 31, all that drivers will have to guide them through the intersection will be yield signs. The traffic lights will be taken down the night before.

“This truly is a big step for the project,” Transportation Agency for Monterey County planner Grant Leonard told The Pine Cone this week.

Roundabout construction manager Bobby Pentorali said the removal of the traffic lights marks a major milestone and the start of the next phase of construction in which crews will build the center island for the roundabout.

“During this time, we will be building the heart of the roundabout, which is a complicated phase of construction, given that the work area will be in the middle of the intersection with traffic traveling around it,” Pentorali said in a statement.

While it’s unclear whether the yield signs will make traffic move more slowly or quickly through the intersection, Leonard said that work on the \$10 million roundabout is still going on, and there are lots of cones, uneven pavement and



PHOTO/KELLY NIX

Will traffic jams soon be a thing of the past on Highway 1 near CHOMP? Drivers will get a hint when the traffic light is removed.

trucks coming and going from the work zone — all of which tend to make traffic slower.

“I think it is important to remember that the project is still very much under construction during this next phase, and with that construction activity, we do expect to see people slowing down and proceeding through the intersection more carefully,” he explained.

While TAMC encourages drivers to slow down for safety reasons, he said that when the roundabout is complete, “it

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New landslide called biggest in state history

■ Highway 1 to be closed indefinitely near SLO county line

By KELLY NIX

AN ENORMOUS landslide containing more than 1 million tons of rock and dirt — the biggest in California history, officials say — fell across Highway 1 on the southern Big



PHOTO/JOHN MADONNA CONSTRUCTION

The landslide at Mud Creek, about nine miles north of the San Luis Obispo and Monterey County line, makes Highway 1 look like a tiny thread and will take months to clear.

Sur coast last weekend, transforming the coastline and making it obvious that the closure of one of the nation’s most scenic routes will continue indefinitely.

On Saturday, the massive 1,500-foot-long and 45-foot-deep slide — about nine miles north of the Monterey County and San Luis Obispo boundary — buried Highway 1 and extended to 250 feet off the shoreline, Caltrans said. The good news is no one was injured.

“We had geologists and engineers out there Monday and Tuesday making assessments,” Caltrans spokeswoman Susana Cruz told The Pine Cone. “We should know more by the end of this week.”

Bad news gets worse

Caltrans workers had already been at Mud Creek assessing a slide which had blocked part of a lane when four more slides occurred last weekend “and consolidated into one slide,” which is now burying the highway. The agency had been considering building a couple of viaducts to take care of the water that was flowing from the hillside there when the massive slide happened.

“Roadwork at Mud Creek was suspended and heavy equipment removed last week due to the threat of new slides and for safety of highway workers,” Cruz

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CHAMBER MONEY DOMINATES BUDGET TALK

By MARY SCHLEY

THE ONLY workshop scheduled for the city council and the public to review the proposed 2016-2017 budget — which outlines how \$23.4 million will be spent during the fiscal year that starts July 1 — was mostly spent debating whether the chamber of commerce should receive the \$27,500 suggested by city administrator Chip Rerig, the \$55,000 requested by the business group, or some amount in between.

The council received the draft budget earlier this month and subsequently submitted questions to Rerig and his staff, as did members of the public. Director of budgets and contracts Sharon Friedrichsen summarized some of those inquiries at the May 23 workshop. She confirmed, for instance, that the city pays bank fees of around \$3,000 per month to Wells Fargo for servicing accounts and processing credit card payments, and that the cost of using a courier service to deliver mail to the 143 residents who ask for it has risen to \$61,000 per year, or almost \$427 per person.

City owes more for pensions

Several people asked about retirement costs, which the state regularly revises. In 2012, the city sold bonds to cover liabilities of \$6.3 million, only to have the state public employees retirement system revise its figures and determine

the city owes more. Therefore, the budget includes \$703,000 for the bond payment and another \$832,000 for the new amount CalPERS identified as the city’s “unfunded liability.”

Regarding spending on public safety — \$3,928,927 for

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Airport may get nonstop to Dallas

By KELLY NIX

HOPING TO attract more tourists and dollars from the Lone Star State, the Monterey Regional Airport and local business leaders are actively trying to get daily nonstop flights between the Monterey Peninsula and Dallas-Fort Worth, officials told The Pine Cone this week.

Monterey airport executive director Michael La Pier said that the airport and several business organizations — as part of the airport’s air-service recruitment plan — are advocating for American Airlines to operate the flights, which would bring of millions of dollars in tourism to the community every year.

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Lake San Antonio making festivalgoers happy — because it has water

By KELLY NIX

EVERYBODY TAKING part in this week’s Lightning in a Bottle festival — Monterey County’s version of Burning Man — will notice a distinct change in the landscape at this year’s event compared to the past three: Lake San Antonio has water in it. Lots of water.

At the 2016 music and arts festival held at the San Antonio Recreation Area in Bradley in southern Monterey County, Lake San Antonio was at only 7 percent of capacity, and was almost completely dry next to the festival grounds. With the heavy rain this winter, though, the estimated 20,000 ticket holders at the May 24-29 festival will be able to enjoy a lake at 57 percent capacity — the most water the lake has had in nearly five years.

“The last time San Antonio’s storage exceeded 57 percent of capacity was in September 2012,” Monterey

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PHOTOS/MICHAEL TROUTMAN, DMT IMAGING

This pirate ship, of sorts, is one of the many creative contraptions at Lake San Antonio for the weekend — and it even has water to sail on.



These colorful and carefree celebrants are among the estimated 20,000 people expected at the Lightning in a Bottle festival.