

TOPANGA TOWN COUNCIL MEETING SUMMARY

On Wednesday, April 17th from 6-9pm, the Topanga Town Council hosted a virtual public meeting focused on the Topanga Canyon Boulevard closure. Featured presenters included Nina Choy, a Geotechnical Specialist from Caltrans, and Lukas Bradley from the Los Angeles County Department of Public Works. Other high-ranking officials from Caltrans, Los Angeles County, the State Legislature, and CHP rounded out the agenda. The jam-packed, three-hour meeting covered a wide range of issues related to the road closure, with the most time devoted to discussing why this particular landslide is so difficult to repair quickly. Other topics dominating the discussion included: our extreme fire risk in light of the blocked evacuation route; the bracing challenges faced by our local small businesses amidst a lack of disaster resources; and the hours-long commutes now confronting residents and commuters trying to access schools and jobs in Pacific Palisades, Santa Monica and beyond. Approximately 385 residents attended, with several having the opportunity to ask questions directly or via the chat feature. Tensions ran high at several points during the evening, but overall, the meeting was highly informative and productive.

The Town Council will continue offering meetings and giving the community updates as they become available. A list of contacts and possible funding programs is forthcoming. To view the meeting online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GseqRgRKGw4>. You can also find information on this topic and many other items of community interest on OneTopanga.com.

FIRE AND EVACUATIONS

Assistant LA County Fire Chief, Drew Smith, and Megan Currier shared several pointers with residents about evacuations in light of the road closure. First and foremost, residents should evacuate early if there is an evacuation warning while Topanga Canyon Boulevard is closed at PCH. Should cellular or landline service be interrupted, he advised folks to use their NOAA radios and tune in to AM radio for frequent critical updates (*e.g.* AM 1070). The Fire Department is actively working with the Sheriff's Department on different evacuation scenarios should a major fire break out during the road closure. They shall be releasing a public memo/press release about these protocols in the near future. In addition, the Fire Department eventually plans to release a list of "best practices" related to how and when one might need to shelter in place. There will be a Topanga Emergency Management Task Force (TEMTF) meeting on Wednesday, April 24th to go over these issues in more depth. Finally, the Evacuation Drill that was planned for this Spring has been postponed until a later date-possibly late Summer or early Fall.

CALTRANS: LANDSLIDE NEWS and TENTATIVE TIMELINE

A team of Caltrans professionals attended the meeting to share the latest technical information about the slide and provide some idea of when the road may reopen. Nina Choy, Caltrans' Geotechnical Specialist, provided a detailed assessment of the slide and the likely mitigation measures that would be needed. She also discussed why some possible solutions suggested by

the community and others likely would not work. She described the landside as a “rotational slide,” which commonly shows slow movement along a curved rupture surface. In addition, a boulder that is about 10 feet high is in the vicinity of the slide and is currently subject to the excess weight of the disturbed hillside-which could cause the boulder to abruptly detach and threaten the lives of anyone located in its path if it does.

When asked if the boulder and excess soil and debris of the landslide could be removed quickly through a detonation process, Choy commented that attempting such a thing would be too risky due to the fact that there are two other vulnerable areas on either side of the current landslide which could be triggered by any sort of explosion. That would result in an even larger landslide that would ultimately take even longer to mitigate. Choy also responded to inquiries about a potential retaining wall solution. She stated that a wall was considered suboptimal because the wall would need to be quite high and substantial in order to hold back the mountain. She thought that would be problematic in a scenic corridor environment.

Why not one lane?

In terms of removing some dirt at the bottom of the slide so that at least one lane could be re-opened for emergency access and other high priority traffic, Choy said that removing the “toe” (*i.e.* bottom) of the slide was inadvisable because it was serving as a bulwark for the rest of the unstable hillside. If it were removed, there is a high probability that the hillside above it-as well as the precariously perched boulder- would come tumbling down onto the Boulevard.

The likely fix

Based on the current assessment, it appears that the most feasible repair option would be to remove large sections of dirt from the top of the hillside downward to remove the excess weight and debris currently present on the unstable site. The amount of dirt that would need to be removed is estimated at approximately 80,000 cubic yards-enough to fill 5,500 dump trucks. Timewise, Caltrans believes that this repair will take them until early Fall 2024.

COUNTY INSIGHTS

Maria Chong Castillo, Head of Public Works for Supervisor Horvath, provided an overview of the County’s commitment to ensuring that a timely solution would be found to mitigate the landslide on TCB. While not technically a county road, the County and Caltrans have long partnered on various large-scale infrastructure projects spanning multiple jurisdictions Chong-Castillo has served as the Head of Public Works under multiple administrations and has had to deal with similar situations before. She helped to instill confidence in the community that all resources would be brought to bear to repair the slide on TCB as quickly as possible.

Sophia Soudani, Supervisor’s Outreach Deputy, summarized the many ways in which the Supervisor was stepping up to help the community, including by visiting the area after the recent slides and reaching out to her contacts across various jurisdictions to make things happen more quickly. Horvath is also committed to supporting small businesses, parents and

students, and other impacted residents. They are in the process of funding a promotional campaign for small businesses here that is currently being developed.

One of the highlights of the evening was the presentation by the County Department of Public Works led by Lukas Bradley. Bradley provided a comprehensive, yet concise, overview of all the emergency projects they were completing on storm-impacted roads in Topanga, with a focus on those serving as our main alternatives to TCB. Residents were encouraged to report any incidents via the Works app (or through DPW's incident website) so that DPW could get to work on repairs as quickly as possible. Several residents commented on how well the app worked and how quickly repairs were implemented once submitted.

Tuna traffic redirection?

One solution often suggested by residents involves redirecting traffic on Tuna. The Sheriff's Department, as represented by Deputy Richard Baldi, discussed why they do not feel that this is a feasible solution. Essentially, it is considered too dangerous to try to redirect traffic there at different times of day. Furthermore, there is a lack of staff who would be available to provide the needed oversight of the redirected traffic flow to make sure that it was followed. CHP clarified that the department technically had no jurisdiction over the PCH-Tuna intersection and hence could not manage traffic there. In addition, he echoed Baldi's assertion that staffing limitations were also a challenge.

STATE SUPPORT

Representatives from Assemblymember Irwin's Office, Nancy Frawley and Araceli Curiel, were present for the meeting and stated that Irwin had been in touch with Caltrans directly to ask for additional information. Frawley also sent a list of potential small business resources to the Topanga Town Council to share with the community. Sam Liu attended from Senator Ben Allen's Office and conveyed the Senators as well as his own sympathy about the toll that this was taking on the community. He has reached out to the LAUSD Board member for our District to see what additional support can be provided to help schools, parents and students adapt to the severe commuting and learning challenges posed by the prolonged TCB closure. His office will partner with Assemblymember Irwin's office, the Topanga Town Council, and Topanga parents to implement solutions. Specific measures that they are looking at include things like a new

bus/van and a Topanga-specific route as well as potential hybrid learning options. A meeting is beign scheduled for next week that will involve key stakeholders.

COMMUNITY COMMENTS and RESPONSE

There was a robust participation from meeting attendees. Comments and questions are being consolidated from the meeting and the chat and will be submitted to the relevant entities for response.

UPDATED INFORMATION AND HELPFUL LINKS COMING SOON

To receive future meeting information and Zoom links, be sure to send us your email at: contact@topangatowncouncil.org. Also, check Onetopanga.com for community stories and events.