

The Marin IJ recently posted an article listing seven Marin towns that could face major traffic jams during an emergency including Sleepy Hollow and Fairfax. FireSAFE Marin Coordinator Todd Lando has addressed several key issues raised by the story.

This article, and most of the discussion about evacuations in general, presupposes that the goal should be that we are able to rapidly evacuate entire communities without the anxiety or inconvenience of traffic. We should propose, instead, that the goal should be that everybody in our community SURVIVES a wildfire, and that evacuations are ORDERLY and without panic. Evacuations should not ADD to the danger, but the assumption that traffic itself is deadly is wrong. Traffic is going to be part of the equation unless we opt for this article's suggestion of multiple, multi-lane freeways leading out of every small town in the Bay Area. That's not realistic and is going to bog down community efforts that will actually make a difference.

We need to start focusing on evacuation safety rather than traffic itself. Slow moving traffic on the major thoroughfares does not necessarily contribute to dramatically greater danger. During the North Bay fires and the Camp Fire, people who *stayed in their cars on pavement* survived. We are not aware of anyone who died in these fires **because of or in a traffic jam** during these fires. The vast majority of those who died **never even left their homes**. And the small number who died while evacuating, by and large drove off of the road into burning vegetation, or were on isolated, **unpaved** rural roads where they were exposed to large amounts of heat from burning vegetation **below** them. Again, those who stayed on the pavement in their cars, protected from heat, smoke, and radiant energy - survived. Were they frightened and inconvenienced by the traffic they encountered? Absolutely. But they survived.

For most of these communities, the initial goal during a wildfire should be to get as many people as possible to the wide paved areas of the valley floor. This might mean getting them INTO the traffic jam. The amount of time it takes to get them to a safe shelter where they will remain until the fire is extinguished is far less important than their safety. There's a monumental misconception that roads along the valley floor (the "main routes") will be consumed by fire, and that being in your car exposes you to greater danger. This is not reality.

Please don't take this as advocating for doing nothing. There are a tremendous number of small steps that need to be taken to improve traffic flow, enhance ingress and egress safety, and improve evacuation orderliness. Let's keep working together to make these happen. That said, increasing the number of exits from a community (the only way to improve a community's score using the logic of this study) or building multi-lane freeways where none exist today is not the answer. We need to educate our neighbors and set achievable goals, and this article/study, while interesting, does not contribute any realistic targets.

Here are some immediately achievable steps that will dramatically increase safety (and reduce traffic) when evacuating:

- ▲ **Fill every seat!** Carpool - pick up neighbors, especially those without cars or who need help (elderly and those with mobility, hearing, or visual impairments).
- ▲ Leave your belongings, take only your **"Go Kit"** (and your family and pets). You're **insured**.
- ▲ Be a good neighbor - **harden your home**, maintain **defensible space**, and clear roadside vegetation where your property fronts a road. If your property doesn't ignite burn, it won't contribute to the problem and may even provide safe shelter while the fire passes if evacuation is not possible.