

# Boulder Creek light — you love it or hate it

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**BOULDER CREEK** — This town's first traffic light, installed in the wake of the Oct. 17 earthquake, may soon be only a memory — and not necessarily a fond one.

The traffic light has split public opinion in Boulder Creek, with some residents claiming it has eased the town's traffic crunch, and others saying it encourages motorists to put the pedal to the metal and careen through downtown. One group of residents has circulated petitions demanding that the light be removed, while others say they will consider legal action to keep the light in place.

The light was installed at the intersec-

tion of highways 9 and 236 to handle the tens of thousands of additional cars diverted onto Highway 9 from quake-damaged Highway 17.

CalTrans has agreed to remove the temporary light as soon as traffic studies in the area are complete, said county Supervisor Fred Keeley.

"The light was installed in response to the quake, and the commitment made by CalTrans at the time was that it was a temporary measure and would come out when the rainy season was over," Keeley said Tuesday. "The latest information is that they are going to remove the light...after traffic studies are completed with the lights in different configurations."

But removal of the stoplight may not be permanent. It's possible that traffic data gathered by CalTrans could result in a permanent traffic light in the future — depending on the outcome of the Boulder Creek Town Plan. Under the umbrella of the town planning process, Boulder Creek residents will attempt to agree on solutions to thorny issues such as park sites, economic revitalization and traffic control.

"The decision about whether to put a permanent traffic light at that site is a decision the entire community will have to make," Keeley said. "The (CalTrans traffic study) will give us reliable, real-world traffic data to work with instead of engineers' projections. We'll revisit this subject when the town plan process be-

gins in August."

On Tuesday CalTrans reset the light and changed it from the standard green-yellow-red pattern to a four-way flashing red light. Traffic engineers will study the changes in traffic speeds and flow patterns and provide a report to town residents. CalTrans spokeswoman Lisa Murphy said she does not know how long those studies will take to complete, but Keeley said he is pushing for removal of the light within several weeks. If studies and the community determine a new traffic light is needed, CalTrans will remove the existing light and install one with underground wiring, Murphy said.

Despite the vigorous debate, Boulder Creek merchant Bill Gutzwiller says the

community is not hopelessly split on the traffic light issue. Gutzwiller was swept into the debate when his daughter was struck by a car downtown several weeks ago, injuring her knee. Some area residents said the accident was caused by a motorist speeding to make the green light at the end of town, but Gutzwiller is not convinced the light is the problem.

"Safety is the real underlying concern here," he said. "Whether people think the light should be here or not, safety is the issue. I'm not a traffic engineer, and I want to listen to the data before I make any kind of decision. I feel the town plan meetings will be the appropriate forum to discuss any new devices on Highway 9. It ought to be a lively debate," he said.