

East Palo Alto's Fred Howell uneasily eyes Dumbarton Bridge traffic

By Thomas G. Keane
Times Tribune staff

Perched in his office on the second floor of the Municipal Services Building in East Palo Alto, City Manager Fred Howell has a bird's-eye view of the traffic flow along University Avenue.

He can only see the north end of the city's main road, but that's the one that intersects with the Dumbarton Bridge approach road.

"Standing here, looking out my window, I see a steady flow of traffic," Howell reported Thursday.

The constant flow of cars, he said, is unusual. But it's a mild stream, nothing to worry about for a city paranoid about an impending tidal wave of automobiles rushing down its main artery.

Howell and other city officials are braced for the worst because University Avenue was opened to

Dumbarton Bridge traffic Tuesday.

So far, few commuters seem to know.

"A few adventuresome souls are heading out there," Howell said. But overall, motorists seem unaware of its existence. "I really think the word hasn't gotten out yet."

Sgt. Dave McIntyre of the East Palo Alto sheriff's substation said University Avenue has had the

same amount of traffic as always.

"At rush hour in the afternoon, it was pretty much the same," he said, "Willow Road was bumper to bumper."

With Willow Road practically at a standstill, Howell believes the news will travel, and the city will soon begin to see some of the 12,000 motorists the California Department of Transportation estimates will choose University daily. That is half the number of cars ex-

pected to cross the bridge each day.

University Avenue is the last new route to be opened as part of the \$200 million Dumbarton Bridge project. Willow Road — between East Palo Alto and Menlo Park — and Marsh Road are the other routes.

City officials believe the increased traffic flow through East Palo Alto's midsection will en-

danger pedestrians — especially children going to Costano Elementary School near Purdue Road — and cause a great deal of air and noise pollution throughout the city.

"My guess is that we're not going to start having problems for a week or 10 days," Howell said.

"Motorists are creatures of habit," he said. "But they'll find out soon enough."

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