

Detour to Hwy 166 causing issues with deliveries

SANTA MARIA, Calif. - The intersection of Highway 101/Highway 166 just north of Santa Maria bustles daily with thousands of cars using the temporary east-west detour.

Last week's catastrophic mudslide in Montecito has closed Highway 101 indefinitely.

It's not only causing a longer commute for motorists heading up or down the coast, it's creating logistical complications for the trucking industry.

"It's been a challenge, yes," said Western Trans Logistics general partner Jim Philson. "It's been a frustration."

The Arroyo Grande-based company connects shippers and receivers with carriers nationwide, including on the Central Coast.

Philson said the blockage of the important roadway in the Santa Barbara area is providing the business with several challenges.

"We had to start making re-routes for a lot of the trucks that would normally run on the coastal route, from Oxnard, Camarillo to Lompoc, Santa Maria, they have to go all the way around and visa versa," Philson said. "Any truck coming out of Santa Maria to Oxnard has to re-route at least 100 miles."

Adding mileage to trucking routes naturally affects the bottom line.

"It is costing more money," said Philson. "More miles, more time. Any more time on the clock, there is a charge for it. Any more miles they have to drive, it all adds up."

In addition to cost increases, the Highway 166 detour is also causing significant delays to deliveries.

"If it's a one-day (delivery), we're telling them to expect it in two," said Philson. "If it's two, it may be three."

Many of delays are due in part to having to change the shorter route on the 101 for deliveries between cities along the coast.

Philson notes carriers may operate 11 hours of driving time per day. If they have to take a longer route, it may reduce how much they are able to deliver.

"If a carrier is driving from, say, Oxnard to Lompoc, they've got to go around. It's going to create more time," said Philson.

Creating even more headaches is having to use Highway 166, a sometimes notorious roadway that has seen traffic spike dramatically over the past week.

"It's a one lane in each direction," said Philson. "It's got a lot of twists and turns. It requires the trucks to drive slower. There's a lot of impatient drivers on the road and there's a lot of accidents and when there's an accident on 166, it stops everything."

With so many issues to handle, Philson, along with others in the industry are hoping Highway 101 can reopen as quickly as possible.

According to Caltrans, the highway will be closed for at least six more days.

"We'll be happy when everything's back together and it's fully opened," Philson said. "It's a relief to know they're getting it cleaned up."

No matter how long it takes for Highway 101 to reopen, Philson said that he, along with his clients, understand the magnitude of the situation.

"People at first were primarily frustrated and upset, receivers and shippers alike, but then they realized, we're looking at a human catastrophe and we've got some loss of life," Philson said. "It's been frustrating, but it's nothing compared to the effects Monetcito is going through."

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