

# San Francisco Chronicle

SFChronicle.com | Sunday, July 18, 2021 | Contains Recycled Paper | \$3.00 \*\*\*\*\* =

#### **RISING REALITY: PART 4**

Coalition of transit, environmental advocates tries to save Bay Area's most vulnerable highway



Carlos Avila Gonzalez / The Chronicle

Traffic crosses the Napa River on Highway 37, which is at risk of sea level rise. While many threats posed by climate change involve short sections of roadway, nearly all 9 miles of Highway 37 in Sonoma County are vulnerable.

## **Elevating roadway** to thwart its demise

#### **By John King**

The best view of the North Bay shoreline comes and goes quickly, unless you're stuck



mate change.

It is by no means the only one. All along San Francisco Bay, low-lying roadways and rail lines face the potential of being flooded

## Unease as mask guidance changes

In Bay Area shift, 7 counties advise indoor protection

#### **By Danielle Echeverria**

Local residents and businesses were adjusting to the latest turnabout in the pandemic Saturday as seven Bay Area counties recommended that everyone – vaccinated or not - mask up indoors once more.

The emotions were all over the place as vaccination rates stall and the highly contagious delta variant sends the number of new coronavirus cases sharply upward.

"Asking a vaccinated person to wear a mask is like asking Superman to wear a bulletproof vest," complained Mark Richardson, a Pleasanton resident who added that he's fully vaccinated and was a "dutiful mask wearer." "The Bay Area has some

Masks continues on A14

## Austin wins big in tech's migration

in heavy traffic while trying to cross the Napa River on Highway 37.

From the crest of the bridge, the panorama is a gentle curve of levee-framed farmland along marshes and open water. The range of hills beyond it ascend to the green spread of Mount Tamalpais.

Then you descend and the highway becomes a one-lane artery in each direction where cars move past marshes and farmland for nearly 10 miles – navigating the major Bay Area roadway most vulnerable to cli-

Catch up with this series — including a podcast, interactive maps showing sea level rise in the Bay Area and in-depth diagrams of how communities plan to or are preparing for rising tides - at sfchronicle.com/ sea-level-rise

as sea levels rise and the bay expands.

"This is a much bigger thing than most people realize," said Randy Rentschler, director of legislation for the Metropolitan Transportation Commission. "The whole area is a transportation network at risk."

That risk is the result of generations treating the shoreline's shallow tidelands and mudflats as easy places to build the infrastructure required by a growing region, including highways and railroad tracks. The Highway 37 continues on A16

#### **By Roland Li**

AUSTIN, Texas – Texas' capital has long been a tech pioneer, starting in the 1960s with IBM and Texas Instruments. In 1984, a University of Texas at Austin student named Michael Dell launched his PC company, which would become one of the largest computer manufacturers. But the rise of social media and mobile phones was concentrated in Silicon Valley, cementing the West Coast as the world's biggest tech hub.

Now, Austin is striving to win the next era of tech.

A year after the pandemic canceled its signature tech and arts conference, SXSW, the city has gone from a harbinger of Austin continues on A10







ANN KILLION

## **Perils of pandemic impinge on Games**

Athletes pulled off the starting blocks?

Entire teams forced to forfeit their Olympic dreams?

It could happen at the Pandemic Olympics. It seems almost inevitable.

"Oh, there will be forfeits," said Michaela George, an assistant professor of Global Public Health at Dominican University.

In almost every Olympic cycle, the Games arrive

>> No-Fun Olympics: With the athlete experience muted, B1 Games have a somber feel.

>> 10 to watch: Katie Ledecky and Alex Morgan aren't the only **B7** Bay Area athletes in Tokyo.

cloaked in trepidation. In the shadow of danger and potential death. The Salt Lake City Winter Games took place while America was still reel-

Killion continues on A15



Tokyo is gearing up to host the Olympics, though only about 20% of Japan has been fully vaccinated against COVID-19.

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#### FROM THE COVER

## Frustration, acceptance over mask guidance

#### Masks from page A1

of the highest vaccinated rates in the country, but our region, along with L.A. County, is unique across the country in recommending masks," Richardson continued. "I thought we were the 'Follow the science' state?"

The shift in guidance from seven Bay Area counties — Alameda, Contra Costa, Marin, San Mateo, Santa Clara, San Francisco and Sonoma — comes just a month after California triumphantly reopened and was spurred by concerns that it's impossible to tell unvaccinated from vaccinated residents in a mask-free situation.

At a Safeway in Menlo Park — where staff never stopped wearing masks — a little over three-quarters of shoppers had donned face coverings. Some said they never stopped wearing them, some didn't mind putting them back on, and some said they really wear masks only because of the social pressure.

Those not wearing masks either hadn't heard about the new guidance or said they felt safe because they were vaccinated. Some had simply fallen out of the habit.

The dissonance between feeling that the worst of the pandemic is over and the reinstatement of preventive measures might lead to confusion and frustration, according to Ashley Virtue, a spokesperson for the National Conflict Resolution Center.

"I think that with the rules changing, just as has happened throughout the pandemic, you will see some people in conflict because they feel like they've adjusted to one set of rules and then they found out that something different has happened," she said. "I'm a little worried that people's nerves are so frayed, they're so fatigued. I'm worried about people getting really upset with each other."

Angela Drake, a clinical psychologist at UC Davis



Thomas Gammer browses in a mask at Avid Reader in Davis. Yolo County recommends masks indoors.

those taken by the governor, she said, which could pose a problem for Newsom if there is widespread backlash. Several of the top

tween local actions and

Republican candidates running to replace him are already trying to make the Los Angeles County mandate an issue in the race. Former San Diego Mayor Kevin Faulconer called on Newsom to overrule the order, and Assembly Member Kevin Kiley, R-Rocklin (Placer County), said he would immediately terminate California's coronavirus state of emergency, the legal basis for many pandemic restrictions, if elected.

Swanson counseled Newsom to "stay the course through choppy waters." She said another surge in deaths from the coronavirus especially if it necessitates a third round of lockdowns — would have far more dire political consequences than a mask requirement.

John Swartzberg, an infectious disease expert UC Berkeley, said he hopes the new guidance will persuade vaccine holdouts to finally get inoculated against COVID.

"I've been dismayed by seeing the really dramatic drop-off in the number of people getting vaccinated," he said, adding that going unvaccinated also creates the potential for new variants to develop.

He said that if the new mask guidance doesn't work and cases continue to rise, a mask mandate could be on the horizon.

"I know the public health officers," he said. "They're going to be waking up every morning, looking at the data, talking to each other and trying to make the best decision possible for safety."

If there is a mandate,

Salgu Wissmath / Special to The Chronicle

President Mark Baldas- | sa sare put it, it's that | la feeling of "here we go | al

again." Baldassare said he thinks that most vaccinated Californians will be willing to wear masks again, especially because so many interact with the unvaccinated every day, whether it's children, people with compromised immune systems or those who aren't comfortable with vaccines.

Nonetheless, it will seem to many that things are going backward, he said. In a May public opinion survey, Baldassare's institute found that 86% of Californians believed that "when it comes to the United States and the pandemic, the worst is behind us."

As of last week, six Bay Area counties had fully vaccinated at least 70% of residents 12 and older — more than Los Angeles County, which had vaccinated just under 60% of that same group. Only Solano County — which, along with Napa County, did not join the rest of the Bay Area in recommending indoor masks for all — lags behind Los Angeles, with 56% of residents over 12 vaccinated.

Some also feared that the change in recommendations could signal that the vaccines do not work well when the opposite is true. Health experts stress that vaccines are hugely effective, and indeed the Bay Area's relatively high vaccination rates are helping keep the virus in check.

Even though it's possible for vaccinated people to experience breakthrough coronavirus infections on rare occasions, they are much less likely to contract severe disease than the unvaccinated, who are at enormous risk from the delta variant, which Los Angeles County public health officials blamed for a rapid spike in new infections and deaths since the July Fourth holiday. Outside the Bay Area, some shrugged off the new-old directives. Davis resident Jill Hosseini, 35, said the new mask recommendations – which were also issued by Yolo, Sacramento and Fresno counties - don't change much for her family. She and her husband continue to wear masks, despite

being vaccinated, as an example for her daughters, ages 5 and 6, who cannot yet be vaccinated.

"It feels safer for my kids because I can't trust knowing if people are vaccinated indoors," she said. "To me, it's such an easy thing to do."

At Avid Reader bookstore in Davis, employees have continued to wear masks, and so have the majority of their customers, said co-owner Erin Arnold. The priority, she said, has been "doing things the right way, doing things according to science," and providing "a safe place for our community."

In other parts of the state, masking requirements were more controversial. Los Angeles County went further than the Bay Area, enacting an indoor mask mandate for evervone that took effect Saturday night. But L.A.'s sheriff said Friday that his department would not enforce the county's mandate and instead asked for voluntary compliance. "Forcing the vaccinated and those who already contracted CO-VID-19 to wear masks indoors is not backed by science and contradicts the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidelines," Sheriff Alex Villanueva wrote in a statement. In May, the CDC said that fully vaccinated people do not need to wear masks in most indoor settings. California's Department of Public Health followed suit a month later. Both maintain those guidelines.

Angela Drake, a clinical psychologist at UC Davis, said she's worried that the roller coaster of emotions brought out by the different phases of the pandemic — from depression during its peak to elation when things started to reopen — will cause increased conflict with the latest backtrack.

"I'm a little worried that people's nerves are so frayed, they're so fatigued," she said. "I'm worried about people getting really upset with each other." She urged people to summon empathy for each other.

"This isn't the time to go up to somebody and scream at them about whether they

Or, as Bay Area resident and Public Policy Institute of California

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have a mask on," she said. "If you see somebody without a mask, it's not your business."

Public feelings about masks could also spill into September's recall election, one political consultant said.

Gov. Gavin Newsom has not yet commented on counties' changing mask rules or guidance. But he made himself the face of California's pandemic response, said Robin Swanson, a Democratic political consultant. Many voters may not draw a distinction beRichardson, the Pleasanton resident, says he'll go back to wearing a mask. But he's not sure it's doing anything.

"It just seems like virtue signaling," he said.

San Francisco Chronicle staff writers Kellie Hwang, Julie Johnson and Alexei Koseff contributed to this report.

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