

Alliance continues opposition to Niles Canyon Road widening

Fremont Bulletin Staff

2/02/2012

The California Department of Transportation announced last month it will restart the environmental review and public comment process for phases one and two of the \$80-million highway widening project in Niles Canyon.

Caltrans will propose a new phase one on its highway safety project in the lower canyon in fall 2012, after it was forced to abandon the original project due to a lawsuit.

The agency will also put aside the draft environmental impact report and restart the public comment and environmental review process for the phase two project in the middle of the canyon.

"We've chased Caltrans' scorched earth policy out of the canyon for now," said Jeff Miller, director of the Alameda Creek Alliance. "Whatever safety concerns Caltrans has and we dispute the claimed safety benefits of the projects can be addressed without road widening and adverse environmental impacts. We will work to ensure the revised projects do not involve filling Alameda Creek or cutting any more trees."

Caltrans terminated the first phase and cancelled the construction contract last month to settle a lawsuit filed by the Alameda Creek Alliance challenging the flawed environmental review process.

The agency anticipates issuing a notice of preparation for a new project in the lower canyon in spring of 2013 and preparing an environmental impact report in 2014.

Caltrans will reopen the environmental review and comment period for the larger phase two project in mid-canyon, due to public opposition, design changes and new safety data. It proposes a new draft environmental impact report for phase two in fall 2012.

The City of Fremont opposes the proposed highway widening and has initiated a process to restrict large trucks weighing more than five tons from Niles Canyon.