

Fremont Niles Canyon Road Controversy

Environmentalists project puts hundreds of Fremont trees on chopping block.

By **Rebecca Baron**
May 7, 2012

Environmentalists protest the widening of Niles Canyon Road in Fremont, though highway officials say the construction is necessary to prevent more accidents.

Environmentalists are protesting an \$80-million Caltrans project to widen one of the most dangerous stretches of roadway in the East Bay.

Groups called Save Niles Canyon and the Alameda Creek Alliance are holding a silent protest Monday outside of a “Road Safety Assessment” hearing on the Niles Canyon highway widening project in Fremont. The project is hosted by Caltrans and the Federal Highway Administration, and the efforts, they say, are to widen the highway to prevent accidents.

But environmentalists aren't happy.

“Since Caltrans has completely ignored all public input, comments and opposition to the project and has yet to consider a safety project without highway widening, we view this latest dog-and-pony show as an attempt by Caltrans to have the FHA somehow “validate” their unnecessary highway widening project,” said Jeff Miller, director of the Alameda Creek Alliance, in a statement. “Scheduling a public input meeting on a Monday morning when most of the community cannot attend is telling.”

Caltrans has proposed a three-phase highway project for much of Niles Canyon Road between Fremont and Interstate Highway 680, with 12-foot lanes, a two-foot median, and eight-foot shoulders. Caltrans proposes cutting 600 trees along Alameda Creek and filling the creek with cement retaining walls. Opponents of the project say this would damage habitat for steelhead trout, Alameda whipsnake and red-legged frog and remove rare sycamore forest. They say there are simple alternatives Caltrans has not evaluated such as flashing or signal lights, radar speed signs, median barriers, additional



rumble strips, focusing on localized problem areas or other measures within the existing roadway.

The protest at the Caltrans/FHA kickoff meeting and presentation on the Road Safety Assessment will be held Monday, from 9 am until noon, at the City of Fremont Housing Division (Niles Conference Room), 39550 Liberty Street in Fremont.