

Activists fight for Niles Canyon Road trees

ALAMEDA COUNTY, Calif. (KGO) -- In Fremont, Caltrans is getting to work on an \$80 million project to widen state Route 84, but the safety improvements for Niles Canyon Road mean the removal of hundreds of trees. A vocal group of activists is now fighting to save them.

The five day project will take out about 40 trees along state Highway 84, also known as Niles Canyon Road. The Caltrans safety project is approved, but a group of environmental activists is trying to stop the rest of the project.

"It's going to cut nearly 500 native trees from along the creek corridor, they're going to move a lot of earth, and build retaining walls, about two miles of cement retaining walls," said Jeff Miller, the Alameda Creek Alliance director.

Niles Canyon Road is a busy route for commuters, from the Central Valley, headed into the Bay Area, but it's also a narrow winding two-lane road and Caltrans is preparing to widen it by adding eight foot shoulders and a two foot median.

"It's narrow, it's dangerous. When you get up toward the narrow passes toward the middle of the mountain you got a lot of diesel trucks. They come around the bend really fast," said commuter Rigoberto Castaneda.

"By expanding the roads, people are naturally going to go faster," said Bruce Cates, an environmental activist.

"It's an incredibly intrusive and destructive project that's going to harm the creek corridor, harm the scenic value of the canyon, and the worst part is that it's completely unnecessary," said Miller.

The environmental impact study says the accident rate here actually dropped below the state wide average between 2005 and 2007.

Regardless, the cutting is already in full swing and it may take some quick legal action to stop the project. Another larger protest is scheduled for this Saturday.