

Niles Canyon makes way for pedestrians and bicyclists

By Johnna M. Laird

An unprecedented event, the first-ever Niles Canyon Stroll and Roll will bar automotive traffic and open the two-lane, winding State Highway 84 through picturesque Niles Canyon to only pedestrians and bicyclists on Sunday, October 11. For hikers who do not want to walk the entire 6.4 miles, Niles Canyon Railway will operate a special service with train stops every two miles to pick up passengers and give weary feet a lift.

Sponsored by Alameda County Supervisors Scott Haggerty and Richard Valle who represent communities that bookend the canyon, the Stroll and Roll could attract quite a crowd. Estimates for attendance range from 1,000 people to 10,000, says Dawn Argula, Chief of Staff Operations for Supervisor Haggerty. This event provides unprecedented access to the Niles Canyon segment of SR 84 for pedestrians and bicyclists. We expect the opportunity will be irresistible to many.

The goal of the event is more than a pleasant stroll on a Sunday, explains Argula. The Stroll and Roll coincides with completion of a Niles Canyon Multi-Use Trail project feasibility study, focused on three options for a paved, 10-foot wide canyon trail for bicyclists, pedestrians, and possibly equestrians.

Trail options will be on display and technical experts will be available at both ends of the roadway from Old Canyon Road in Fremont and Main Street in Sunol. Supervisors are calling this a community meeting where questions can be answered about the proposed recreational path and public input can be gathered. Supervisors are garnering input on which trail alignment the public favors as well as which historical and natural resources to highlight and which ones to avoid impacting. Questions include whether to have pedestrians and bicyclists cross a railway with an under crossing, over crossing, or at train/grade level.

The study identifies advantages and technical challenges of each option and was funded by Alameda County and East Bay Regional Parks District. In addition to these two governmental groups, representatives of Alameda County Water District and San Francisco Public Utilities Commission (also known as SF Water Power Sewer), which have interest in the canyon and a trail, will be available that day.

During the Stroll and Roll bicyclists will be separated from pedestrians, but both groups will share the road and must remain on roadway for their safety and for protection of natural resources.

A resource fair with about 15 vendors, a number of whom have a connection to Niles Canyon, will be located near the start of the walk on the Fremont side. Vendors who had signed up as of late September include Alameda County Transportation Commission, Bike Mobile, Alameda Creek Alliance, San Francisco Public Utilities Commission, Alameda County Water District, CalTrans, and Alameda County Resource Conservation District.

A public trail through the breathtaking Niles Canyon has been discussed since the 1970s.

Tri-City residents have known for a long time that Niles Canyon contains some of the

East Bays most stunning scenery and is ripe for exploration, says Supervisor Valle. Today more people than ever recognize the beauty of the canyon and the increasing numbers of hikers and bicyclists who go there make this trail project more important than ever.

Supervisor Haggerty, a leader in transportation issues, identifies a Niles Canyon trail as a big step toward completing an interconnected trail network through Alameda County and the East Bay. Opportunities for recreation and alternative transportation are at the top of the list in terms of what our residents want. This project provides us with a rare opportunity to respond to the community's wishes in multiple ways.

No funding has been designated for the project, but discussions have included state and federal funds, grants, and Alameda County's Measure BB transportation sales tax. For more information about the proposed pathway, visit <http://acgov.org/board/district2/documents/2015.06.30-Community-Meeting-3.pdf>.

For information about the Niles Canyon Stroll and Roll, contact Guy Ashley at (510) 272-6569, visit <http://www.acgov.org/board/district2/> or <http://www.ncry.org/>.

Niles Canyon Stroll and Roll

Sunday, Oct 11

8 a.m. - 2 p.m. (Warnings will be issued along the roadway at 1 p.m. that Niles Canyon will open at 2 p.m. to vehicular traffic)

Start at Main St in Sunol or Old Canyon Rd in Fremont

(510) 272-6569

<http://www.acgov.org/board/district2/>

Free