

Environmental group sues Caltrans over Niles Canyon project

Opposes road widening, tree removal, soil excavation for wildlife impacts

A local environmental group is suing Caltrans over a bridge replacement project in Niles Canyon, east of Fremont, alleging that construction work would damage the habitat for threatened steelhead trout, Alameda whipsnakes and red-legged frogs.

In its lawsuit in Alameda County Superior Court, the Alameda Creek Alliance says that in addition to replacing the bridge, Caltrans wants to widen and re-engineer a half mile of Niles Canyon Road, cut nearly 300 trees, excavate along thousands of feet of the canyon, and build large retaining walls.

"Replacing and upgrading the old bridge would be fine," Alameda Creek Alliance director Jeff Miller said in a statement.

But Miller said, "Cutting 300 trees along Alameda Creek and a state scenic highway so that Caltrans can convert half a mile of Niles Canyon Road into a freeway is not acceptable."

Miller said, "Caltrans has consistently ignored community requests to slow traffic down in the canyon and the project would speed traffic up in this dangerous stretch."

He said the project would replace the 89-year-old Alameda Creek Bridge and add modern safety railings and road shoulders for bicyclist and motorist safety.

But he said Caltrans also proposes engineering the approaches to the bridge to increase motorist speeds from 35 to 45 mph.

The lawsuit challenges Caltrans' approval and environmental approval for the bridge replacement project.

Miller said, "This project would make Niles Canyon Road more dangerous for drivers and cyclists, and lead to further road widening and tree cutting by Caltrans."

He said, "Caltrans bears full responsibility for delays in road safety projects in the canyon. This is an agency that can't seem to follow the law in terms of disclosing the impacts of its projects to the public and conducting an adequate environmental review."