

Thank you for contacting Caltrans with your concerns regarding the Niles Canyon I safety improvement project on State Route 84 between the Rosewanes Underpass and the Farwell Underpass.

As you may know, Niles Canyon is experiencing a significant amount of collisions. Our records show that for the 10 years between 1999 and 2008, there were 436 traffic collisions, 11 of which resulted in fatalities and 226 of which resulted in injuries along State Route 84 in Niles Canyon. More than one third of the 436 total collisions are cross median and run-off-road collisions. These types of collisions are associated with most of the fatality and serious injury accidents along the route.

The Niles Canyon I safety improvement project will widen shoulders to meet current standards, realign the northbound direction around the existing pier at the Rosewanes Underpass, lower the roadway pavement by several inches to meet vertical clearance requirements at the Rosewanes and Farwell Underpasses, construct a left-turn pocket at Palomares Road, shift Palomares Road towards the west for improved sight distance, and construct centerline and shoulder rumble strips. The shoulders, in particular, will provide room for errant vehicles, serve as a safe refuge for disabled motorists, provide access for emergency responders, and provide increased safety for bicyclists and pedestrians. Wider shoulders will also provide law enforcement with a safer location to conduct traffic stops. The project will also add centerline and shoulder rumble strips to warn drivers when crossing the centerline or right edge of the travelled way. These countermeasures have proven to be effective at reducing the cross median and run-off road collisions and should result in less fatality and serious injury incidents along the route.

Concern has been expressed that motorists' speed may increase due to a wider highway. Please know that the speed limit for State Route 84 will not be increased as a result of the safety improvement project. Caltrans will continue to work with the California Highway Patrol and local law enforcement to encourage motorists to drive responsibly within the posted speed limits.

In order to move forward with these safety improvements, Caltrans completed the required environmental process satisfying the state and the federal requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) in June 2006. The public was given an opportunity to provide comments regarding the project during that process.

Please know that Caltrans has taken extreme care to minimize any potential long-term impacts to the surrounding environment. For example, Caltrans has minimized the project impacts by using retaining walls to limit encroachment into environmentally sensitive habitat. Except for a 92-foot long segment along Palomares Road, the retaining walls will largely be obscured from view to the roadway users. Additionally, Caltrans will use an architectural (random rock) finish on all retaining walls to 1) visually integrate the roadway improvement into the natural environment; 2) mimic the scenic aesthetic of the existing random rock retaining walls along the creek side; and 3) create an aesthetic appearance that will be used to unify the appearance and blend in to the scenic quality of the canyon. Re-

vegetation measures and natural re-growth will, in time, obscure views of the majority of the retaining walls. The use of visible retaining walls has been kept to a minimum in order to reduce the visual impacts to the scenic canyon. In addition, there will be no adverse effect to historic resources within the project limits.

Furthermore, Caltrans will also be constructing a clear span bridge to remove a critical barrier and improve fish passage along Stony brook creek, a tributary to Alameda Creek. However, some impacts, such as the removal of trees, will be necessary. Native trees which are being removed will be replaced at a ratio of at least three trees for every tree removed. Some of the native trees will be replaced at a higher ratio of five trees for every tree removed. When construction is complete, the project site will be restored as much as possible to pre-project conditions.

Caltrans fully shares your appreciation of the scenic beauty of the Niles Canyon area. We worked closely with Alameda County, the cities of Fremont and Union City, and the community to help designate State Route 84 through Niles Canyon as a State scenic highway in 2007. We also share your concern and the community's concern regarding the potential impact of the proposed safety improvement project on the scenic beauty of the canyon. Caltrans is committed to being a good steward of the Bay Area's natural resources and strives to balance this commitment with our priority to ensure safe highways for the motoring public, bicyclists and pedestrians. We appreciate your comments and concerns regarding Niles Canyon.

Caltrans is still reviewing the communities' comments regarding the next proposed project to improve safety on State Route 84 in Niles Canyon from just east of the Alameda Creek Bridge to Interstate 680 and anticipates publishing the findings in Fall 2011. For more information please visit: <http://www.dot.ca.gov/dist4/nilescanyon/>