

Caltrans District 4
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Comments On Alameda Creek Bridge Replacement Project

Caltrans' project to replace and upgrade the Alameda Creek Bridge does not require overbuilt roadway approaches. This bridge segment can be made safer without massive cut-and-fill, construction of large retaining walls, or removing hundreds of trees.

Caltrans must consider a project alternative that would replace the bridge at the current speed of 35 mph. The new bridge could have modern safety railings and road shoulders on the bridge for bicyclist and motorist safety, to address the project safety concerns. Proven traffic calming measures could be used to make the bridge safer at 35 mph, such as the use of flashing and traffic lights, rumble strips, radar feedback signs, and other passive speed control measures. This would scale back the proposed tree cutting and other severe environmental impacts.

The proposed project to engineer the bridge and its approaches to increase motorist speeds from 35 to 45 mph, and widen the entire roadway through the .6 mile project reach to 42 feet, with shoulders, would increase motorist speeds though the project reach and could actually reduce motorist and bicyclist safety. Caltrans' overbuilt approach would damage significant areas of the canyon and the ecology of Alameda Creek, requiring hundreds to thousands of feet of cut-and-fill and large retaining walls, both above the roadway and adjacent to Alameda Creek. It would also require cutting from 284 to 414 native trees.

Caltrans must complete its promised mitigation for the tree-cutting in lower Niles Canyon in 2011, when the agency cut 150 native trees along Alameda Creek, before any Alameda Creek Bridge replacement project is pursued. The Federal Highway Administration has identified four other accident hot-spots within Niles Canyon in need of safety improvement that are higher priority projects than the Alameda Creek Bridge.

The proposed bridge replacement project does contains some environmentally beneficial elements, including removal of a concrete weir in Alameda Creek which currently serves as a barrier to fish passage, removal of the existing bridge's in-stream piers, and removal of invasive plants.

The Environmental Impact Report must evaluate an alternative that meets the safety goals of the project without severe environmental and aesthetic impacts to Niles Canyon.