

Fishhook redesign hearing postponed

Caltrans still tweaking plan to mollify public

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SCOTTS VALLEY — A meeting to update the public on the latest plans for the Fishhook interchange has been postponed for a month as Caltrans continues to fine-tune a design unveiled earlier this summer.

At its meeting Thursday, the Santa Cruz County Transportation Commission scheduled a public hearing for Oct. 20. The meeting will be held in the evening somewhere in the Mid-County area. The exact location has not yet been determined. In the meantime, the commission likely will not take action on the project until later in the fall.

Caltrans officials unveiled their latest design

for the Fishhook in June. The new plan addressed concerns of residents opposed to the scope, aesthetics and neighborhood impact of an earlier proposal. Heated opposition had prompted the Santa Cruz City Council to reject the project.

In response, Caltrans lowered the elevated portion of southbound Highway 17 over southbound Highway 1 and shifted a proposed Ocean Street bridge away from residences. Also, a 40-foot-high, three-level concrete interchange was reduced to a 25-foot-high, two-level structure.

Planning to make the Fishhook safer began in 1985, when the local transportation commission asked Caltrans to study the notorious junction. The interchange was found to have an accident rate five times that of the state average for highway interchanges.

Public meetings were held and a redesign plan was chosen from several alternatives last year. The plan being fine-tuned now is a vari-

ation on the alternative chosen last year.

Construction is to begin in the year 2000 and to take three years to complete. Stage I of the rebuilding is expected to cost \$30.8 million.

Once the final plan is approved by the commission, Caltrans plans to schedule neighborhood meetings to discuss such things as sound walls, landscaping and other aesthetics. A facilitator has been hired to conduct the meetings.

Opponents have banded together and formed the Coalition for an Improved Fishhook. The alliance includes residents from surrounding neighborhoods and has met throughout the summer.

At Thursday's meeting, Eloise Graham, organizer of the coalition, offered the group's suggestions on fixing the Fishhook: Use signs, restripe and reduce the speed limit. The commission said it would consider the recommendations.