

# Fishhook snags ire on all sides

## Backseat driver



Nancy Chin

**I** ASKED A READER once if he knew of anyone who had strong feelings about the Fishhook, he responded: "Know of anyone who doesn't?"

He was right, especially now that the busy interchange of Highways 1 and 17 is scheduled to be revamped. In 2000, Caltrans is to begin rebuilding the notorious junction to improve safety. It's a high accident spot, with five times as many collisions as the state average.

No one I talk to objects to making the merging of the two routes safer. Some residents and commuters welcome the changes and say it's long overdue. Lessen the risk on the roads and save lives as soon as possible, they say. But it's a question of *how* to do just that that's causing the commotion.

See, some folks don't think that what Caltrans has proposed would actually be an improvement — be it functionally or aesthetically. Among several features in the works are a 40-foot-tall overpass that would elevate southbound Highway 17 drivers and merge them into southbound Highway 1. In one spot, a wall rises 42 feet high.

The structure would lift traffic noise and raise the noise level, especially for surrounding neighborhoods. That's why several sound walls also are included in the plans.

Last week, I wrote a story about several Plymouth Street residents who live near one of the proposed sound walls. They think the project will ruin their neighborhood and destroy the character of the entire county.

I asked for your comments, and I sure got them. Thank you all for responding. Several readers offered opinions but did not want to give their names. They were afraid they'd be targeted by people who disagree. As they explained it to me, those who favored rebuilding the interchange would be branded as pro-development — an ugly label here in Paradise. Meanwhile, those against the project said they feared reprisal from commuters who want the Fishhook rebuilt and from others who could benefit from the jobs the new construction could bring. So there seems to be a bit of skittishness all around.

Still, for those who did identify themselves, there's not enough space in this column to include everyone's two cents. And for that reason, some responses have been edited. Here's a sampling ...

**Kem Akol, 41, of Aptos, real estate agent:** Those residents (who oppose the Fishhook) are another group of NIMBYs — not in my back yard — who don't care about the community as a whole, just how something is going to affect their little microcosms of life. ... As long as people are coming here and the rest of us have to drive over the hill, we need that interchange. It will make life much easier for everyone.

**Clay Maynard, 56, of Soquel, former manager of the county 911 communications center:** When I was at the (911) center, I saw the calls coming in and the dispatcher sending crews out on all these incidents (at the Fishhook). ... Without improving it, you're sentencing drivers to injury, accidents and sometimes death. That's a heck of a price to

preschool teacher: I'm opposed to the Fishhook project. It's too great a cost on the environment and our beauty here. ... I think the overpass is going to be a problem with earthquakes. It'll cause more deaths than the Fishhook. People need to be educated on how to drive. We don't need to build an ugly monolith.

**Joseph St. Clair, 83, of Scotts Valley, retired language instructor:** The Fishhook as it is now is abominable. It has to be changed. ... The small minority (against it) is always vocal and vociferous. They should look at the hundreds of thousands of people who need this rather than look out their window and say 'Hey, we don't want this.' ... We are a community. We have to work together.

**Edward Gibson, 58, of Santa Cruz, retired PG&E worker:** The new overpass will just send people on to Mission Street even faster. (The higher speeds) will replace one safety hazard for another.

**Mayme Mitcalf, 79, of Santa Cruz:** People go around (the Fishhook) like a speed track. They should go ahead with the project, no matter what people think. The Fishhook ought to be wiped out. I want to be safe.

**John Barnes, 67, of Scotts Valley, retired GTE property manager:** The Fishhook is a tremendous disaster. It's unfortunate for the people living close to it, but the project needs to be done. It's been long overdue because of the danger that the Fishhook entails. I feel sorry for the people who live near it.

**Darrel Louis, 46, of Santa Cruz, roofing contractor:** I think the idea of the Fishhook improvement is absolutely what's needed. (The appearance) of the structure is the least of my considerations. I'm insensitive to that. I'm concerned with the functionality. ... Sometimes we look at things as no growth. ... But it bites us in the tail in the end.

**Betsy Robinson, of Rio del Mar:** These changes do not just impact the surrounding residents. They impact all of us who live in Santa Cruz County and don't want to feel like we live in a concrete jungle. We live here for the beauty and the small town atmosphere. Otherwise we'd live in Santa Clara County.

**Wolfgang Rosenberg, 70, of Santa Cruz, retired:** I think the plan is a travesty because it would make sure that Santa Cruz becomes like L.A. — totally cemented in. The idea of uprooting all those plants and trees and spending millions of dollars to add all those separators is a waste.

**Gerald Bartlett, Jr., 80, of Pasatiempo, retired PG&E lineman superintendent:** They should leave the Fishhook alone and spend the money on public transport. ... (If not, then) the Fishhook should go full board in spite of what the neighbors say. We're living in a different world. ... The only way we can keep these horrible accidents from happening is to keep a very definite traffic separation so nobody will have to cross over. The only way to go is the elevated structure.

**Peter Scott, 63, of Santa Cruz, teacher:** The proposed modifications are out of scale with the topography. And, like other ugly channels in San Jose and elsewhere, will only collect grime, trash, graffiti and bad air. It will be one more place turned dead by concrete paving and noisy machines.

**Mills J. Ridgway, 63, of Soquel, retired:** As a frequent user of the Fishhook, there is no doubt in my mind that improvement is needed. But to build what Caltrans has proposed is preposterous. ... Need it be an interchange from hell? I think not.

Questions or comments about your drive? Nancy Chin writes about

life. ... As long as people are coming here and the rest of us have to drive over the hill, we need that interchange. It will make life much easier for everyone.

**Clay Maynard, 56, of Soquel, former manager of the county 911 communications center:** When I was at the (911) center, I saw the calls coming in and the dispatcher sending crews out on all these incidents (at the Fishhook). ... Without improving it, you're sentencing drivers to injury, accidents and sometimes death. That's a heck of a price to pay. The existing design is unworkable. ... If they want to save lives, then they've got to do something. The people who don't want it there because of the aesthetics are selfish.

**Wendy Ruddick, 46, of Aptos,**

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*Questions or comments about your drive? Nancy Chin writes about commuting issues. Contact her by calling 423-6397, selection code 6040; or by e-mail: [cruzbox@aol.com](mailto:cruzbox@aol.com); by fax: 429-9620; or send letters to Backseat Driver, Santa Cruz County Sentinel, P.O. Box 638, Santa Cruz, Calif. 95061.*