

Action Slated On Hwy. 17

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By Wallace Wood
Sentinel Staff Writer

State Senator Donald Grunsky have agreed to re-open the question of timing a freeway over the 10-mile mountain stretch of Highway 17 known to residents as "blood alley."

State Senator Donald Grunsky asked for the hearing as part of a rapidly growing drive by government officials in two counties to eliminate the killer status of the road. The hearing will be held in Sacramento January 18.

Santa Cruz and Santa Clara county officials, city representatives from San Jose, Santa Cruz, and Los Gatos, legislators, newspaper publishers, chamber of commerce heads will be asked to meet in Los Gatos next week and map strategy for the hearing.

Santa Cruz County Supervisor's Chairman Tom Black said today this county wants to sponsor the meeting.

Twisting and curving from Los Gatos to Santa's Village near Scotts Valley, the scenic four-lane roadway has claimed lives at a high rate. Ten persons have died on the Santa Cruz county side alone this year, six of them in the last month. Two years ago, the toll was eight persons on this side of the summit. Last year it was nine. And 1966 still is not over.

But the state division of highways up to now does not plan a major freeway or realignment of the highway until 1976, at least.

Instead, state engineers are trying to eliminate the deadliest sections, such as Laurel curve or Upper Glenwood cutoff. Left turn lanes have already gone in at Vine Hill road.

Unfortunately, not all improvements have been for the better. A guard rail installed at Laurel curve now prevents out-of-control vehicles from going over an embankment. It knocks them back into the path of other cars instead.

The local highway patrol office and the county Safety Council now have asked for removal of the guard rail. The state agreed, and has decided to realign the entire curve.

Local residents and the county safety council have agitated for a new freeway for years.

Figures gathered by the county public works department show that traffic on the roadway has increased from an average daily flow of 16,250 vehicles in 1964 to an estimated 21,000 today. During the peak summer months, 28,000 vehicles are estimated to have passed over the road.

Santa Clara county supervisors also have urged the state to speed up its freeway planning.

Since Santa Cruz county receives only \$1 million each year in allocated funds from the state for highway improvements, Black points out this area could not possibly stand the cost of a multi-million-dollar freeway.

"We want to make it absolutely clear that additional funds are needed from the state, over and above the usual amounts given to the counties for road improvement. Otherwise we would be penalized for, say, 30 years for building a freeway there."

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