

Statement by Wallace Stegner, President, Committee For Green Foothills, presented at State Highway Commission Public Hearing, Woodside High School, February 6, 1964.

My name is Wallace Stegner. I live on Three Forks Lane in Los Altos Hills, and I represent, as their president, almost 500 members of the Committee for Green Foothills. This organization draws its membership from Peninsula communities, principally from Woodside, Alpine Hills, Portola Valley, Palo Alto, and Los Altos Hills, and is dedicated to promoting and supporting the wisest land use for the foothill area.

It is our belief that indiscriminate or unlimited development in the foothills has been an appalling error wherever it has been permitted. It is likewise our belief that the proposed Willow Road freeway link to the Skyline would inevitably produce, would literally create, the kind of development we hope to forestall.

The mid-Peninsula section of the Santa Cruz Range, so far only slightly marred, is the greatest single asset of the entire valley. It is scenic backdrop, protective watershed, air conditioner, and recreational retreat. Remove it or overbuild it and the Peninsula cities lose all their quality, and become mere collections of shopping centers and ringworm tracts. A freeway, by any route, would scar and deface this precious resource, but the freeway by itself is less dangerous than what it would produce. For in these matters demand follows supply; build a fast road and you inevitably suck in the cars to fill it, and shortly overfill it.

The Division of Highways has built, and will build, splendid and essential roads. It is moreover directed by law to spend on roads all those millions of dollars in gas taxes which, also by law, keep accumulating in its till. But it is not so clear to us, as citizens of California, that all those gas tax dollars should forever go to that particular purpose. There are too many complex factors of social need and social consequence involved; we must reconsider whether a single agency, and that one whose professional existence is predicated on the continual expansion of the highway system,

should have the sole power of decision in these matters. I think that too often the Division of Highways gets blamed for things that are not its direct doing—for smog, roadside blight, and much else. I would not blame it for those things, which are products of our automotive society. But I would ask if the cure for these ills lies in more highways, more smog, more roadside blight, more loss of land and beauty.

Freeways are planned on the basis of population and traffic projections, presumably to serve public needs and assure what are called the "rights" of newcomers. But the rights of present residents are also at issue here---and not one community through which this freeway would pass wants it. This is more than negativism or obstructionism, and more than a mere selfish desire to shift the road into someone else's backyard. It is a deep doubt that the freeway will actually serve any real public need; a fear that it will cause what it pretends to be a response to; a suspicion that its evil consequences will outweigh its good; and that it will benefit not the large public but a few developers.

Projections are dangerous things to build the future on. Already, population projections are having to be revised, because the birth rate on which they were built has been dropping for two years as the public gradually becomes aware of the potential for disaster in the stork derby. With glacial slowness, the public also grows aware of the dangers in the automobile, that servant which has enslaved its masters. Beyond question, the future will have to move toward adequate public transportation, not toward an indefinitely enlarged highway system that threatens to bury us under pavement and pollute every square inch of our air. Even ten years ago, more of America was under pavement than was reserved in all our national parks, and that proportion does not get better with the passage of time. Our obligation is to do what we can to reverse the present trend, and there is every indication of a great groundswell

of public feeling on this subject. I cite you San Francisco and Monterey, and the recent defeat of Robert Moses' roadbuilding plans in New York, as straws in the wind.

What we need now is not debate on the best route for a Willow Road freeway extension; what we need is a reconsideration of our whole transportation problem--- with all those problems of air pollution, uglification, traffic fatalities, and bad land use that go along with it. We need to ask ourselves if we are not spending all our money on roads to go somewhere, and nothing on the somewhere to which we might want to go. We need to inquire if we are not complicating our problems by our solutions of them.

The Committee for Green Foothills is not reconciled to a trans-Skyline freeway. It considers that any such freeway, on any route, would be an almost unmitigated disaster. For any such freeway would be a loaded and cocked gun aimed straight at the heart of the last splendid open space on the Peninsula. Its construction would be one more step deeper into the entanglement from which sooner or later---and why not sooner, since we are rational animals?---we will all have to retreat.