

TEARING A NEIGHBORHOOD IN TWO

THE BEGIN HIGHWAY IN BEIT SAFafa

Right in the heart of the neighborhood of Beit Safafa, massive construction is currently underway to transform an internal road into a six-lane highway. The new road will slice the neighborhood in two, cut off its internal roads and completely alter the character of this quiet community while creating a grave environmental threat for its inhabitants.

Beit Safafa is a neighborhood in southern Jerusalem with 9,300 residents. Most of the neighborhood is located in East Jerusalem. Until 1967, Beit Safafa was divided between Israel and Jordan. The two sides were separated by train tracks, which also served as the border (Green Line). Most of the residents of the neighborhood maintain the status of permanent residents. A minority are Israeli citizens.

Creating a Greater Jerusalem

Road 4, also known as the Begin Highway, is a Jerusalem ring road expediting north-south travel and linking to Tel Aviv via road 443. The extension currently under construction would bisect the village, creating one continuous stretch of highway from the Gush Etzion settlement bloc south of the city to the Givat Ze'ev settlement bloc to the north. It would ultimately link the West Bank's two most controversial highways: the Tunnel Road connecting Gush Etzion to Jerusalem in the south and Road 443, designed to route settler traffic north of the city to Tel Aviv while denying access to Palestinians. The width of the road planned to cut through the neighborhood ranges from 33 to 78 meters. Part of it will exist as a six-lane highway and other parts could have as many as 10-11 lanes.

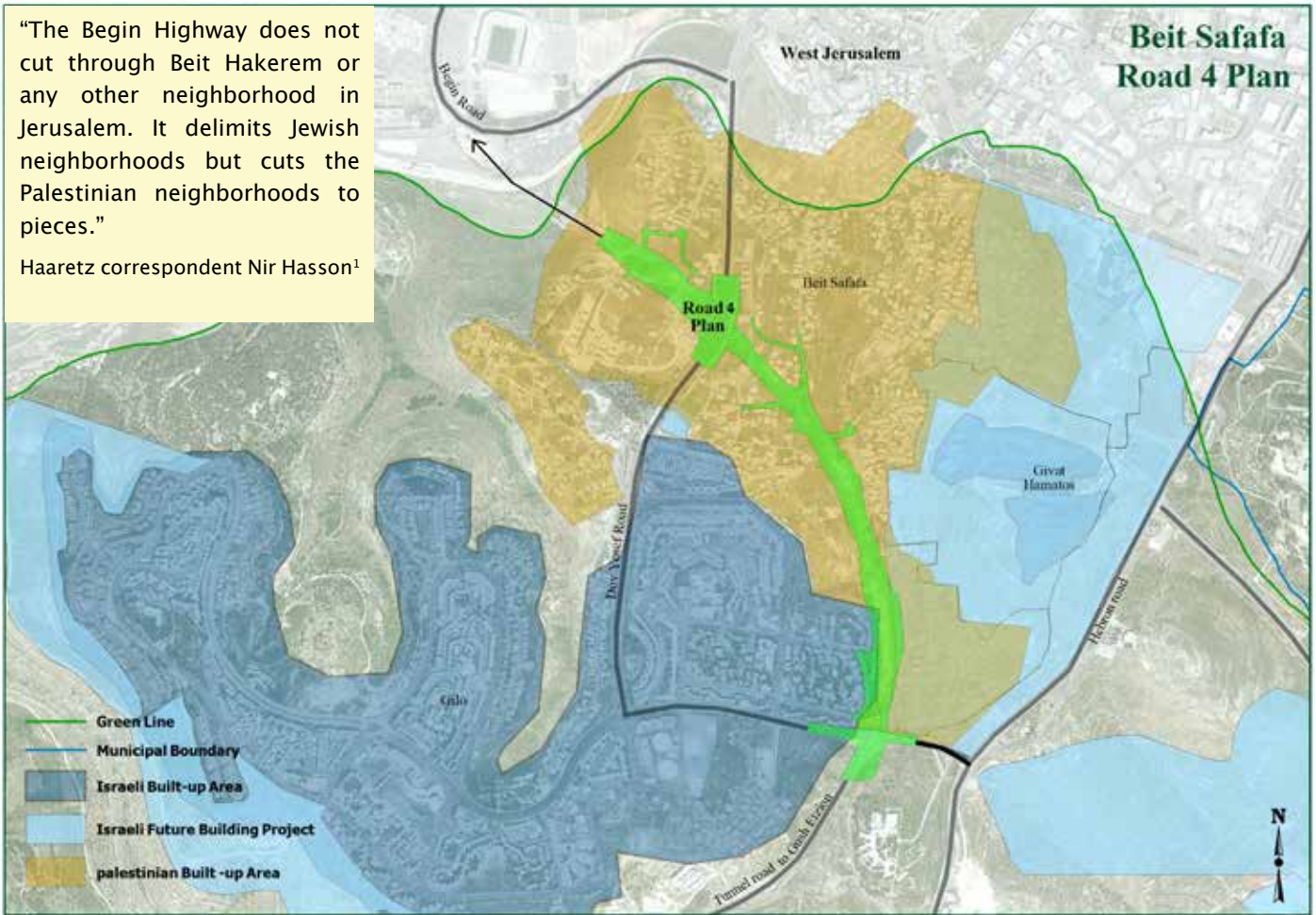
Once the road is completed, the three dominant settlement blocs in the Jerusalem area (Gush Etzion in the south, Givat Ze'ev in the north and Ma'ale Adumim, via Highway No. 1, in the east) will be joined to a network of highways that will cut through the city from three sides—part of a comprehensive strategy to employ settlement building and road construction to consolidate a vision of a “Greater Jerusalem” that expands deeply into the West Bank, splits it in two and cuts it off from East Jerusalem.

Despite the gravity of the plan's political consequences, at no time was a public debate held on a policy that will radically change the character of Jerusalem; instead, decisions were made in small, closed government forums. The Jerusalem Municipality and other governmental bodies are implementing the plan while bypassing requisite procedures for public inclusion—completely contrary to the interests of the residents of Beit Safafa, who find themselves trapped by political decisions wholly indifferent to their welfare.

The Resident's Petition against the Road

On December 12, 2012, on behalf of Alaa Salman and 15 residents of Beit Safafa, Attorney Kais Nasser submitted an administrative petition to the Jerusalem District Court against the Jerusalem Municipality and its development company, Moriah, responsible for carrying out the road construction. Salman has lived in his home with his parents, his siblings and their families since 2000. It is now anticipated that an acoustic wall will be built within a few meters of Salman's home, purportedly to block noise from the planned highway. The road and wall will

“The Begin Highway does not cut through Beit Hakerem or any other neighborhood in Jerusalem. It delimits Jewish neighborhoods but cuts the Palestinian neighborhoods to pieces.”
Haaretz correspondent Nir Hasson¹



block the air, the view and passage to other parts of the neighborhood: the children’s school, the health clinic, the cemetery and the mosque.

Only during negotiations with the Municipality did the residents of Beit Safafa discover that the city had already submitted applications for building permits to construct the road in its expanded form. At that time, the Municipality made the concession of offering to lower the road and build a roof over a small section of it, satisfying neither the village administration nor its residents.

Unlike other segments of the Begin Highway, the section of the road planned to run through Beit Safafa is the only piece for which the Municipality has not yet submitted a detailed plan nor provided residents an opportunity for objections. The Municipality maintains its position based on a plan from 1990 which, according to residents,

designated a local neighborhood road and not the major highway currently under construction. Even though the planned road confiscates hundreds of dunams of village land, and despite its severe impact on quality of life for its residents, the people of Beit Safafa were given no opportunity to present their arguments against the road. Further, the Municipality maintains that the residents have forfeited their right to demand compensation for the lost value of their homes.

The Beit Safafa residents are waging a public campaign to block the road.
To join them or to receive future updates:
ala_slman@yahoo.com
aviv@ir-amim.org.il

¹ Nir Hasson, "Beit Safafa being ruined," December 20, 2012, <http://www.haaretz.com/news/national/new-jerusalem-highway-to-cut-arab-neighborhood-in-half.premium-1.486018>

