



BEHIND THE WHEEL

Victim Count Mounts Along Morris Bridge

By RICH SHOPES

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Motorists say Morris Bridge Road in northwest Hillsborough County is getting dangerous, especially from Cross Creek Boulevard to the Pasco line, but a Hillsborough official said he's not sure the road's the problem.

The two-mile stretch from Cross Creek logged 43 crashes from Jan. 1, 2005, to June 1, 2007, including one fatality, according to the Hillsborough County Sheriff's Office.

Another accident claimed a life last week near Cross Creek, and a few weeks ago a motorcyclist and his passenger were killed when they collided with a van.

"At least every month I drive by an accident, somebody in the road, somebody flipped over, somebody in the side of the ditch," said Fran Shiver of Zephyrhills.

Susan Gibbs, also of Zephyrhills, said, "I travel this road every day and wonder when I'm next. ... Just drive the road and look at all the crosses."

Shiver blames the 55 mph speed limit and lack of paved shoulders. After sloping into a ditch on both sides of the road, the grass comes to the edge of the two-lane highway. Also, there are no street lights.

If the right tires drop off the pavement, drivers have to jerk the vehicle to the left to get back on the road, Shiver said.

Hillsborough's Public Works Director Bob Gordon said his office will check the accident data and the highway. While he wouldn't rule out a fix, he cautioned it might not happen soon.

Morris Bridge isn't part of the county's five-year road improvement program, which ranks roads by traffic volume and condition. Also, Morris Bridge is flanked by wetlands, so a permit may be required even to add shoulders.

"There's no easy solution. We'll take a look and see if there are any opportunities to do something in the interim," Gordon said.

MPO To Unveil Transit's Future

The Metropolitan Planning Organization, Hillsborough's long-range planning agency, will unveil its long-term vision for mass transit this week.

The plan, which includes a network of light-rail and commuter trains with bus connections, is the result of a yearlong study and interviews with residents.

Presentations to officials and technical experts are set for today and Thursday. A public unveiling is scheduled for 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. Saturday in the lobby area at Museum of Science & Industry, 4801 E. Fowler Ave.

Sheldon Lights Out Of Sync

Bob Hileman of Town 'N Country recently asked why the traffic signal at Sheldon Road and Fawn Ridge Boulevard is out of sync with the signal 500 feet away at Sheldon and Citrus Park Drive.

"If I'm coming south and catch the light at Citrus Park, invariably I'll catch the light at Fawn Ridge," he said.

The Fawn Ridge signal was added a few years ago because of increased development in Citrus Park, said Mike McCarthy, Hillsborough's traffic services director.

Triggered by sensors, the Fawn Ridge signal should activate when cars are waiting and traffic is light on Sheldon. Hileman said it activates even when Sheldon's traffic is heavy.

The problem might be caused by the timing of the clocks at the Citrus Park and Fawn Ridge intersections being out of sync, McCarthy said. "I'll have someone go out and check the sensors."

Got a gripe about your commute? Contact reporter Rich Shopes at rshopes@tampatrib.com or (813) 259-7633.