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Wrecks plague new intersection **Fifty wrecks recorded at interstate overpass**

Chris Butler, Reporter
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Ruston police, public works officials and drivers agree on at least one thing.

The overpass that goes over I-20 to connect with the North Service Road near the entrance to Wal-Mart is probably the most dangerous intersection in the city.

The overpass opened up to traffic a little more than a year ago, and police have since recorded a total of 50 accidents there, said Lt. Curtis Hawkins, spokesman for the Ruston Police Department.

The most recent traffic accident at that intersection happened last week. A woman sustained injuries after her car crashed into a nearby ditch, although her injuries weren't life-threatening.

Casey Jones, of Ringgold, wasn't the person injured, although his truck sustained major damage as he was trying to turn right onto the North Service Road.

"I was just pulling out of Wal-Mart after stopping at a stop sign, and I heard a loud noise. I looked to my left and saw a truck coming dead at me," Jones said.

"The guy in that truck said that the blue car here (that landed in the ditch) tried to cross into the lane on the service road too soon (after leaving the overpass) and he hit the side of her car. When he hit the side of that car, then that car shot over into that ditch. When that happened, his truck ricocheted toward me. I had no time to get out of the way of it, and he hit me from the side."

Witnesses at the scene said they see many accidents at that intersection, often because people ignore a stop sign at the end of the overpass.

Lewis Love, director of public works for Ruston, said he's received many complaints about that particular intersection.

"I can understand why this intersection is a problem. People can get antsy there after traffic gets backed up too much, so they take a chance," Love said.

The state of Louisiana has jurisdiction over the intersection, and officials with the state Department of Transportation already are trying to decide what to do to make it safer, Love said.

DOTD officials are currently reviewing the number of accidents that have occurred at that intersection, Love said.



"Personally, I think there will have to be some sort of traffic control device. It was the DOTD's call in the beginning (whether to have traffic control there) and it was not required in the contract," he said.

"Traffic signals may or may not help. I am expecting some sort of signal control at those intersections, but there is a process to go through and the DOTD has been responsive and helpful."

Richard Aillet, city engineer, said DOTD officials might install some sort of traffic control, depending on the results of their study of that intersection. Such traffic control may include traffic lights, a four-way stop or adjusting the posted speed limit.

"One thing they (the DOTD) don't like to do is throw up traffic lights because it sometimes creates more problems than it solves," Aillet said. "Sometimes when you have traffic lights at an intersection, you trade side-car collisions for rear-end collisions. We know we have a lot of wrecks there and that we need something, but we want to make sure that we have the most proper control device for that intersection."

After they finish their study, DOTD officials are scheduled to meet with Ruston's public works officials Aug. 6 and propose ways to reduce the high number of traffic accidents at that intersection, said Curt Gallien, assistant district administrator for operations at the state DOTD office in Monroe.

"We have completed all of our field work, which started two weeks ago, but we have not completed our analysis," Gallien said. "We will have some data available to help us offer alternative ideas by the time of the meeting in August. Right now, I don't know what our study will ultimately show. One alternative may be to do nothing."

DOTD officials might propose to do nothing if they determine that a majority of the traffic accidents took place when the intersection opened to traffic but was still undergoing some form of construction.

Traffic cones, for instance, were still up on the road after state officials officially opened the intersection to the public, he said.

"We don't want to make decisions based on something that happened during temporary traffic control conditions," Gallien said.

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