

Safety team endorses Route 1 overhaul

By: Gwen Runkle, Staff Writer

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Transportation commissioner promises quick action to cut accident rate.

EWING — With accident rates double or triple the state average in some spots, there's no question Route 1 is a dangerous highway.

But now, with expert advice from a team of state and federal transportation officials, Jack Lettiere, state Department of Transportation commissioner, says it won't be long before Route 1's track record is turned around.

"Too often, all we hear about are plans or studies, but what residents really want are results," the commissioner said Thursday at the DOT's headquarters in Ewing, as he unveiled preliminary findings by a new Safety Impact Team. "We're here today to demonstrate our commitment to identifying problems, getting them fixed and getting them fixed soon."

This week, the Safety Impact Team, made up of representatives from the DOT, National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, Federal Highway Administration and Federal Motor Carrier Administration, along with local law enforcement officials, analyzed a 10-mile stretch of Route 1 from Franklin Corner Road in Lawrence to Ridge Road in South Brunswick.

The group looked at accident data, conducted an on-site inspection and put together a concept report identifying safety improvements to be put into practice right away.

These include improving signal timing for cars and pedestrians, reviewing all directional signage on the highway, accelerating a schedule for pavement resurfacing projects, establishing a driver safety partnership with the business community and collaborating with NJ Transit to examine bus stop safety.

A full report of recommendations is expected by June 7 at the earliest.

"But we're not going to wait until the final report comes out to act," Commissioner Lettiere added. "We're going to start immediately and probably by the end of July even identify other safe corridors in the state for the team to start picking off one at a time."

So far, the DOT has identified 13 highways, including Routes 1, 206 and 130, as "safe corridors," based on the roadways' higher-than-average accident or fatality rates during 2001.

In 2001, there were 7,329 crashes on the entire length of Route 1 with 20 fatalities, and 2,209 crashes with seven fatalities on Route 130. On Route 206, there were 2,726 auto accidents with 15 fatalities, according to DOT statistics.

Being identified as a "safe corridor" not only puts a roadway in line for a team study, but also means that if new highway safety legislation is passed, traffic fines could be doubled in those areas.

The legislation is part of Gov. James E. McGreevey's "Safety First" initiative, which combines \$20 million in highway improvements over the next five years with stricter police enforcement and enhanced driver education for all motorists.

The "Safety First" legislation would allow the DOT to double fines in the most dangerous sections of roads labeled as "safe corridors."

The state Assembly was expected to vote on the legislation, A-3527, Thursday. The state Senate is currently reviewing companion legislation, S-2495.

The Safety Impact Team concept is expected to be used as a nationwide model as well, the commissioner said.

"New Jersey used to be a leader in transportation efforts," Commissioner Lettiere said. "Today, we're reinventing New Jersey as a leader and I don't think there's a better place to start than safety."

Route 1 stretch flagged on safety

By RAVEN HILL
STAFF WRITER

SOUTH BRUNSWICK: A safety review of Route 1 between South Brunswick and Lawrence revealed improvements are needed in sign visibility, traffic-signal timing, road surface and pedestrian safety, said transportation officials.

A Safety Impact Team comprised of state and federal transportation officials conducted a statistical analysis of accidents on a 10-mile section of Route 1, between Franklin Corner Road in Lawrence and Ridge Road in South Brunswick last week. The study will assist state officials in determining whether any safety measures have been overlooked.

An interim plan that will be immediately implemented calls for improving signal timing for cars and pedestrians at intersections, a full review of all directional signs along the highway, acceleration of scheduling for pavement resurfacing projects and exploring the establishment of a driver safety partnership with the business community.

A full report with detailed findings and short- and long-term recommendations will be released in the next two months.

The group, which included representatives from the Federal Highway Administration, National Highway Traffic Safety Administration and National Motor Carrier Association, is the first of its kind.

"With safety impact teams, we are going to make New Jersey's roadways safer — highway by highway, intersection by intersection," said Jack Lettiere, state transportation commissioner.

Among state highways, Route 1 is the most dangerous and deadly, with 7,329 crashes and 20 fatalities in 2001.

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