

Community Traffic Safety Team Meeting Minutes of July 08, 2015

The meeting was called to order by chair, Steve Diez. The introductions were made and the minutes approved. There was only one old problem location, and that was the Withlacoochee State trail crossing at Independence Highway at the intersection of US 41 north of Inverness. Cyclist Jeanne Newman told of the collision last week with her bike and a car as she was crossing N. Independence Hwy. The details of the crash and the discussion regarding possible improvements to the crossing are reported in the Chronicle article included in the minutes.

Cyclists Steve Olsen and Harry Vandenberg expressed their thoughts for changing the intersection. Mr. Vandenberg provided a power point presentation to demonstrate his suggestions.

Joel Provenzano of the DOT explained the various configurations, and how some possible changes could adversely affect cyclists, pedestrians and motorists alike. Improvements can be made with right of way acquisitions from the Department of Environmental Protection.

There were no other new problem locations.

EVENTS / ACTIVITIES

Sue reported that there are 11 new Child Passenger Safety Technicians who recently completed the three day class for certification. In Citrus County the new techs are: Paul Gillum, fire inspector with the Citrus County Sheriff's office, Barbara Lawson, nurse with Dr. Fialko's pediatric medical practice, and Denise Reed, transporter with Nature Coast EMS. Cristian Miller with the Hernando County Sheriff's office is a new tech in Hernando County, along with Delia Jimenez from the Brooksville office of Head Start, and Department of Health peer counselors, Amy Fritsch and Jennie Lanziero.

Sue also mentioned that 300 safety seats were provided for Citrus County children from July 1, 2014 to June 30 2015 through the Early Learning Coalition and the Sheriff's office. Car seat inspections in Citrus County show that 89.7% of car seats checked had one or more misuse.

There were no reports for open forum.

**The next West Central CTST meeting will be held on Wednesday, August 12, 2015 at 1:00 pm
at the DOT office in Brooksville.**

Page A3 - THURSDAY, JULY 9, 2015

STATE & LOCAL

CITRUS COUNTY CHRONICLE

Controversial crossing addressed

FDOT to continue with current plans

BUSTER THOMPSON
Staff writer

"She never saw me."

That was what Withlacoochee State Trail cyclist Jeanne Neuman shared with county and state transportation officials on Wednesday at a Community Traffic Safety Team meeting about her June 30 collision with a car when crossing North Independence Highway near the U.S. 41 intersection, north of Inverness.

The Community Traffic Safety Team, or CTST, is a group made up of local highway-safety advocates who petition concerns over problematic roadway and crossing designs with the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT).

Neuman recounted how she was cycling south on the trail that Tuesday when she came up to one of two shared crossings put in by FDOT at North Independence Highway.

After seeing a green light for traffic on U.S. 41, Neuman said she let a car go by that was making a right onto North

Independence Highway, and then continued to cycle through the crossing only to be hit by a car traveling east on North Independence Highway, just short of the other side.

Her spine was fractured as a result of the crash.

A Citrus County sheriff's deputy stated in the crash report that no fault could be determined because of conflicting statements made by Neuman and the driver; in addition to having no witnesses. Neuman is one of three cyclists who were involved in a traffic crash at these crossings in June, according to the sheriff's office.

Wednesday's CTST meeting was almost solely dedicated to addressing this particular crossing design with FDOT.

After installing a traffic signal last year due to heavy traffic flow and removing the original trail crossing that ran straight through North Independence Highway, FDOT forced cyclists and pedestrians to navigate a 90-degree turn toward a crossing closer to the intersection.

FDOT later put the original crossing back in March after bikers kept going over the removed crossing when they didn't want to navigate that sharp angle toward the intersection.

ON THE NET

■ To view the conceptual crosswalk design by the Florida Department of Transportation, click on this story at www.chronicleonline.com

Cars and cyclists are having difficulties sharing the road, especially when cars turn into and from North Independence Highway — now with two shared crossings.

"This current trail crossing is hazardous," trail user Steven Olsen said.

Joel Provenzano, a traffic and safety expert with FDOT, said on Wednesday the department's original intentions last year were to gradually realign the trail closer to the intersection, but they didn't have time during the "fast-tracked project" to permit with the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) for right of way access.

Provenzano admitted FDOT is doing what it can on bike and pedestrian safety, with guidance from other traffic departments like the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

"Bicycle and pedestrian safety in that past couple of years hasn't been a very important topic," he

said. "Now it is."

Trail users flooded Provenzano various improvement suggestions, including raising the crossing to allow for more awareness by approaching cars and cyclists; prohibiting cars from turning onto North Independence Highway when cyclists are signaled to cross; and gradually realigning the trail crossing further from the intersection.

"There are ways to improve the safety of the crossing where it is now," Olsen said.

Provenzano said gradual trail realignment 10 feet closer to the intersection is still moving ahead.

He said it was statistically the safer option reviewed by FDOT because it would primarily allow motorists and cyclists to better see each other, and have the fairest accommodation for both traveling parties.

The revised design and permitting for a right-of-way acquisition from DEP is expected to happen in late 2015, FDOT stated in a release.

"It's hard to design for literally everything," Provenzano said, quelling concerns from trail users. "But we do our best."

Contact Chronicle reporter Buster Thompson at 352-564-2916 or bthompson@chronicleonline.com.