



# INFORMATION RELEASE

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### **HIGHWAY 278 IMPROVEMENTS PLANNED IN DREW COUNTY**

**LITTLE ROCK (12-2)** -- The Arkansas State Highway and Transportation Department (AHTD) has announced plans to make improvements to a section of Highway 278 in Drew County. The area is located approximately two miles east of Monticello at the location of two curves. The curves have been the site of several lane and roadway departure crashes in recent years, especially for drivers less familiar with the highway.

A fatal accident in August of this year brought additional attention to the area. A civil engineering student from Alabama lost her life when her car crossed the centerline of the highway on a rainy morning. The student was living in Monticello for the summer while working as an intern at a nearby mill.

Shortly after the August accident, a study was requested by Highway Commissioner Robert S. Moore, Jr., of Arkansas City, and AHTD Director Scott Bennett to evaluate the types of problems occurring and to determine what actions could be taken to enhance safety in the area. The study found that the area has an overall crash rate higher than the statewide average for similar roads, but the fatality and serious injury crash rate was slightly below the statewide average. "The most telling thing we learned from the study is that wet pavement crashes occurred at a rate over three times higher than the statewide average," Bennett noted.

Even prior to the completion of the study, larger "Sharp Curve Ahead" signs were installed at the westernmost curve. Rumble bars have also been added across the travel lanes at the sign locations to further alert motorists of the curves ahead and the need to adjust their speed accordingly.

Also as an interim measure, work to remove and replace the top two inches of asphalt from the highway is underway this week. The work will be complete by Friday, December 5<sup>th</sup>, weather permitting. The new driving surface and stripes will increase traction and visibility through the area.

Based on the study findings, the Arkansas Highway Commission authorized a safety project for 2015 (referred to as Phase One in the study) to install a 'High Friction Surface Treatment' through the westernmost curve of the studied area. "The HFST is a relatively new process that has yielded good results in reducing the number of wet pavement crashes in the areas where it's been installed. Because of temperature restrictions for applying the treatment, the work cannot begin until next spring. We believe the changes that have already been implemented on this highway, combined with the HFST, will greatly enhance safety in the area in a relatively short period of time," Bennett noted.

The safety study also identified this section of Highway 278 as an area where the installation of center and edge line rumble strips would be beneficial. A project to install rumble strips on several highways in south Arkansas, including this section of Highway 278, will begin in the Spring of 2015.

The study also recommended realigning the curves in the future (Phase Two in the study). "Realignment of the curves is not something that can be accomplished in a short period of time," Bennett explained. "We must go through the detailed federal environmental studies, acquire the necessary additional right of way, and relocate utilities to accommodate the work. Therefore, no timeframe has been established for the Phase Two work. We will monitor the impacts of the changes made, including the Phase One work, and schedule the additional improvements as funds and conditions warrant."

