



INFORMATION RELEASE

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Safety Improvements to U.S. Highway 70 in Garland and Saline Counties

LITTLE ROCK (12-18) – The Arkansas State Highway and Transportation Department (AHTD) anticipates that installation of centerline rumble strips on U.S. Highway 70 between Hot Springs and Interstate 30 will be completed this week. Centerline rumble strips produce a noise when driven over to notify drivers that the vehicle is leaving its lane, which will enhance the safety of this corridor.

In July 2014, the Highway Commission authorized the Director to schedule projects to install rumble strips statewide to appropriate routes as funds became available. The work on U.S. Highway 70 was originally included in a project scheduled for the October 2015 bid letting. However, because of concern over the increase in the frequency and severity of crashes, the AHTD added centerline rumble strips into an on-going contract in early August to expedite installation on U.S. Highway 70. Additional centerline rumble strip work on U.S. Highway 70 was also added to the project let in October 2015.

This portion of U.S. Highway 70 has experienced an increase in severe crashes this year, part of a statewide and nationwide trend. Decreases in gas prices have led to an increase in travel. In calendar year 2014, there were three fatalities on this portion of U.S. Highway 70 according to reports from Arkansas State Police. Since January 2015, an additional ten fatalities have occurred.

In January 2014, Arkansas launched a "Toward Zero Deaths" (TZD) program. There are about 500 roadway fatalities each year in Arkansas, but the TZD program goal is to eventually shrink that number to zero. The TZD implementation team includes the AHTD, the Arkansas State Police, and the Arkansas Department of Health. The TZD program promotes an interdisciplinary approach to reducing traffic crashes, injuries and deaths on the roadways by employing proven countermeasures through education, enforcement, engineering and emergency services strategies.

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“With more vehicles on the road, it is imperative that everyone take safety seriously if we are to move toward zero deaths,” commented Director Scott Bennett. “Safety is our highest priority, and successfully getting everyone to their destinations safely is a shared responsibility that includes drivers, transportation engineers, law enforcement, and emergency response teams.”

“Arkansas State Police has recently stepped up enforcement on U.S. Highway 70 between Hot Springs and Interstate 30, and will continue to do so,” according to Lieutenant Colonel Shawn Garner, Deputy Director of Field Operations with Arkansas State Police.

The speed limit on U.S. Highway 70 is 55 miles per hour (mph). However, a recent study revealed that the 85th percentile speed is approximately 70 mph. The 85th percentile speed is a measure of what free-flowing traffic is traveling at or below. “We urge drivers to slow down and to be safety conscious,” added Lieutenant Colonel Garner.

AHTD has coordinated with the Arkansas State Police to determine the location of three radar speed trailers along the route to alert drivers if they are exceeding the speed limit. Two electronic changeable message boards are being placed at either end of U.S. Highway 70 that will display messages to remind drivers about the dangers of speeding, driving under the influence of alcohol and/or drugs, and texting while driving.

The AHTD currently has two projects scheduled to widen U.S. Highway 70 in Garland and Saline Counties to five lanes with safety improvements that will include re-alignment of some curves, new pavement surface, new signs, new markings, and wider shoulders. The total cost of these improvements is \$109 million, which includes engineering, right-of-way acquisition, utility adjustments and construction.

The eastern project will improve U.S. Highway 70 from State Highway 128 to Interstate 30 and is being funded with regularly apportioned Federal and State funds. Design and environmental handling are nearing completion and right-of-way acquisition and utility relocation activities are underway. Depending on the progress of relocating the utilities, this project is anticipated to be let to contract between mid-2016 and late 2016.

The western project will improve U.S. Highway 70 from Hot Springs to State Highway 128 and is being funded with revenue from the one-half cent sales tax approved by voters in 2012 for highway improvements, also known as the Connecting Arkansas Program (CAP). Once the CAP was approved, the AHTD started the process of hiring a consultant to develop and schedule this project. Along with the other projects in the CAP, this project’s schedule is based on cash flow projections from the one-half cent sales tax revenue and based on the estimated time needed for project development. Project development activities generally

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include surveys, environmental handling, design, right-of-way acquisition and utility relocation. Because the terrain along this western project is considerably more rugged than the eastern project, more curve re-alignment is required. This results in requiring more right-of-way acquisition and utility adjustments. Currently, environmental handling is nearing completion and design is underway. It is anticipated that right-of-way acquisition and utility adjustments can begin early next year. Based on the current timeline, this project is scheduled to be let to contract in late 2017. However, the Department is re-evaluating this schedule to see if and how much the project can be expedited.

Director Bennett emphasized, "AHTD is committed to moving toward zero deaths with our safety partners. Those partners include drivers, law enforcement, and emergency responders. We encourage all road users to practice safe and responsible driving – because even one death is too many."

Additional travel information can be found at IDriveArkansas.com or ArkansasHighways.com. Additional highway safety information can be found at tzdarkansas.org or asp.arkansas.gov. You can also follow AHTD on Twitter@AHTD, and follow TZD Arkansas @TZDarkansas or [facebook/TZDarkansas](https://www.facebook.com/TZDarkansas).