

CAPE GAZETTE



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Rumble strips could reduce Route 1 crashes

By Ron MacArthur

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Many people are convinced John G. Griffith would be alive today if something as simple as rumble strips were in place along the Route 1 corridor in coastal Sussex.

Griffith, 44, of Timonium, Md., was killed early last July 28, as he worked on his bicycle off the shoulder near the Indian River Inlet bridge. Police said the driver apparently fell asleep, drifted onto the shoulder and hit Griffith, director of Johns Hopkins Fibroid Center for the Department of Gynecology and Obstetrics. He died at the scene.

This week, 11.5 miles of bicycle-friendly rumble strips will be placed along the length of the 17-mile section just south of Dewey Beach to just north of Fenwick Island.

Delaware Department of Transportation (DelDOT) Secretary Carolann Wicks said in a press conference Friday, Jan. 25, the strips are an effort to curb the problem of run-off-the-road crashes – the type of crash that claimed Griffith's life. He is survived by his wife, Liz, and three children.

A DelDOT review of the corridor revealed that of the 179 crashes between January 2004 and December 2006, 60 – about one-third - were run-off-the-road crashes. Nine of the 60 crashes involved a vehicle striking a cyclist outside the travel lane.

Wicks said motorists who run off the road cause 37 percent of all crashes in Delaware, which is slightly less than the national average of 42 percent.

She said most of that could be attributed to a change in driving styles with more motorists multitasking as they drive and more people pushing the limits by driving when they are tired.

"The strips are a wake-up call to pay attention," she said.

The U.S. Department of Transportation Federal Highway Administration lists rumble strips as the most cost-effective way to reduce crashes. On the website, a Delaware

project was highlighted as a major success story.

After rumble strips were added to the centerline of Route 301 in New Castle County, head-on collisions were reduced 90 percent even though traffic increased 30 percent.

Run-off-the-road crashes were reduced 88 percent on the New York State Thruway and 52 percent on the Virginia interstate system after the installation of rumble strips, according to the Federal Highway Administration.

The Route 1 strips are unique and were developed after meetings with cycling groups, Wicks said. They are the first bicycle-friendly rumble strips used in the state.

Compared to traditional rumble strips, the Route 1 strips will be less deep, closer to the road and narrower. The strips will be 8 inches from the edge of the white stripe on the road (12 inches is the standard), be three-eighths inches deep (one-half inch is the standard) and will be 12 inches wide (compared to the traditional 16 inches wide).

“The result was a design that is functional without compromising safety,” Wicks said.

Mike Tyler of Lewes, advocacy chairman for Sussex Cyclists, said the group was not thrilled about rumble strips at first. But, he said, the smaller strip was acceptable. “If it could save one life, it’s a good compromise,” he said.

Wicks said Sen. George Bunting, D-Bethany Beach, and Rep. Gerald Hocker, R-Ocean View, contacted her after the crash asking what measures could be taken to lessen the probability of another similar tragedy.

The \$50,000 project is expected to take one week to complete. The strips will not be placed where roads and driveways intersect Route 1 and along developed areas where constant breaks would be required.

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