

LoudounExtra.com

Route 15 Gets Upgrades Near Site Of Accident That Killed 2 Teens

By Arianne Aryanpur

Originally published at 2:57 p.m., August 15, 2007

The Virginia Department of Transportation has completed several safety improvements to Route 15 near the site just north of Leesburg where two teenagers died in a car accident in December, according to a VDOT official's letter.

The \$29,000 in upgrades include guardrails, improved lane markings and better signage at the intersection of the bypass and Business Route 15, according to the letter from VDOT engineer Farid Bigdeli to Leesburg Town Manager John A. Wells, which was included in the agenda for last week's Town Council meeting.

But Bigdeli said in an interview that funding is still needed for additional improvements at the intersection. Those upgrades, estimated to cost \$750,000, include relocating an overhead sign and adding flashing lights.

The changes were the result of a safety analysis VDOT conducted this year. Residents and public officials urged the agency to expedite its plans for the study after the Dec. 6 accident in which Dustin Muse, 16, and his sister Courtney, 13, both of Frederick, were killed. Their car was traveling just north of the split between the bypass and Business Route 15 when it veered off the road and into an embankment.

Some residents, including Donald Muse, the teenagers' father, said a confusing traffic pattern might have contributed to the accident. Several months before the crash, VDOT had painted diagonal stripes in the right lane used by southbound Route 15 drivers approaching the split. The markings forced motorists trying to stay on Business Route 15 to merge left, then immediately right.

The VDOT letter said the agency removed the striping in the spring after finding that some motorists were disregarding the markings and cutting off other drivers.

The agency also removed some signs to reduce clutter, installed several guardrails and extended existing ones to meet safety standards. Other suggested changes, such as widening the shoulder and adding rumble strips, were deemed unnecessary, Bigdeli said.

Leesburg Town Council member Kenneth D. Reid, who had pushed for the Route 15 safety analysis even before the accident, said last week that he was pleased with the changes but that more safety upgrades are needed.

“There is money now,” Reid said, referring to the General Assembly’s recent transportation spending package. “I think [VDOT] has neglected the safety of this road and other roads for way too long.”

VDOT is in the process of completing Route 15 improvements at two other sites between Leesburg and the Maryland line, Bigdeli said.

The first site is where Route 15 intersects Limestone School Road and Montessor Road. The other location is where Route 15 intersects Route 663 and Spinks Ferry Road. At both locations, VDOT is adding turn lanes, widening shoulders and improving drainage, Bigdeli said. The agency also is building a truck enforcement area on Route 15 north of Spinks Ferry Road.

Those improvements, estimated to cost \$7.6 million, are expected to be completed by November, Bigdeli said.

Copyright 2007 The Washington Post Company