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MoDOT, county answer SOS call for safer roads

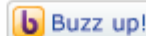
Officials announce plan to add shoulders, other improvements

By Joe Scott

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Every time members of Shoulders for Safety (SOS) talked to state and county officials about adding shoulders to two-lane highways in southwestern St. Charles County, they got the same response.

"We were told time and again, 'Keep up the good work, but (a solution) is going to be years down the road,'" SOS member Randy Frump recalled. But every month, someone lost a life on the roads, he said.

Defiance area residents formed SOS nine months ago, telling officials how in 14 months 11 people had been killed in accidents along highways 94, D and DD where there are no shoulders and no margin for error, Frump said.

On Tuesday, Missouri Department of Transportation (MoDOT) and St. Charles County officials announced an agreement to add 2- to 3-foot-wide shoulders along 15 miles of highways 94, D and DD. Those stretches of state roads possibly are the most dangerous 15 miles of highway in the state.

Officials made the announcement at Frontier Middle School on Highway DD. Frump and fellow SOS members Cheryl Coleman, Nancy DuBois and Peggy Brazil attended the news conference, as did state Sen. Scott Rupp, R-2nd District, of Wentzville, and state Reps. Chuck Gatschenberger, R-13 District, of Lake Saint Louis, and Scott Dieckhaus, R-109th District, of Washington.



RYAN PREWITT PHOTO Shoulders for Safety members (from left) Mike DuBois, Nancy DuBois, Debbie Keyes, Cheryl Coleman, Sherry Cybularz, Peggy Brazil, Michelle Friedman and Randy Frump stand alongside Highway D near August A. Busch Memorial Conservation Area. The group's lobbying efforts have led to plans to add shoulders and other safety improvements to portions of highways D, DD and 94 in southwestern St. Charles County.

"This is a glorious day," said Frump, whose 26-year-old son Bryan was killed Jan. 1, 2009, in an accident on Highway D. "I know Bryan is looking down on me today from heaven, and he's proud of his dad and SOS."

MoDOT also plans to flatten slopes along the roads, add rumble stripes, do an asphalt overlay and make other improvements to Highway 94 south of Highway D to Defiance; Highway D from 94 to Highway DD; and Highway DD from south of Sommers Road to Highway D.

The exact amount of work will depend on the bids that come in from contractors, said Jim Gremaud, MoDOT's St. Charles County area engineer.

Work is expected to begin in spring 2011 and be completed in 2011.

"Normally, it takes about five years to get projects through," said Grace Nichols, a Missouri Highway and Transportation commissioner from St. Charles. "To have a project come before the commission in December, and we're here today to announce this project will happen right away, that's exciting for all of us."

Nichols was referring to a presentation made by SOS to the highway commission when it met in St. Charles last December.

"These are dangerous roads without shoulders, and they need to be improved," said St. Charles County Executive Steve Ehlmann.

Frontier Middle School Principal Phil Ragusky said 20 or more buses carrying 600 to 700 students and 100 teachers are on those highways daily during the school year. Last year, a Francis Howell Middle School bus went off the road, but no one was seriously injured.

Ragusky said road conditions "are constantly on our radar."

Ehlmann said SOS' grass-roots effort was the driving force behind getting the work done so quickly.

Nichols said MoDOT will use \$4 million in safety funds to add shoulders to the narrow, hilly stretches of state roads. Area companies will donate about \$1.5 million worth of materials to the project. The county will contribute 10 percent in matching funds - about \$400,000 - from its road fund.

In February, the County Council approved spending up to \$3 million by matching 10 percent of the funds MoDOT spends on improvements to those highways. Ehlmann and Councilman Joe Brazil, R-District 2, said they wanted to encourage safety improvements, although the county has no responsibility for maintaining the state highways.

The agreement still needs final approval from the highway commission and County Council, but Ehlmann said Tuesday he was confident it would get done.

Even with the improvements, Ehlmann said the work isn't finished. Previously, Gremaud estimated there are about 100 miles of shoulderless highways in southwest St. Charles County.

"People continue to move into the area," Ehlmann said. "The work is never done - not in St. Charles County."