

1/26/06

Hello Neighbors!

As we all know, Hwy. 71 is fast becoming one of the most dangerous roads in Travis County, if not Central Texas. The winding nature of the road, combined with the many hills, blind entrances, speeding drivers, unattentive drivers, drivers gabbing on cell phones instead of paying attention to their driving - all of which is increasing due to unbridled development and population growth - have created truly serious traffic concerns.

The Hill Country Alliance has spearheaded serious discussions with Travis County government regarding the impending development explosion about to be ignited by Gunn & Whittington's "Sweetwater" subdivision, adjacent to Bee Creek, and its effect on an already dangerous roadway.

Yesterday, after witnessing several incidents involving extremely aggressive driving and speeding, plus a couple of close calls between motorists, I called the Travis County Sheriff's Office Traffic Enforcement - West Office and had a long talk with one of the supervisors there.

After acknowledging the seriousness of the situation and the fact that the bottom line remains that TX DOT is the only entity who can take any serious action regarding Hwy. 71, he told me that this issue has been elevated to high priority status and that a 5 unit task force has been authorized, beginning next month (February) to, in effect, "stake out" spots along the stretch of road between the Pedernales River and Hamilton Pool Road. Particular areas of concern are the Westbound lanes that turn into one lane in the vicinity of the Cedars and La Cabana. This alteration of the highway was implemented due to 5 or so fatalities which occurred when drivers were killed while trying to turn left onto Pedernales Canyon Trail without benefit of a turn lane. The idea was to slow down traffic through that stretch of road and cut down on the dangers. Any of you who travel through that point, particularly during afternoon rush hour, have experienced the "free for all" that occurs with cars, some driving upwards of 80 mph, failing to merge into the right-hand lane (as clearly indicated by the traffic signs) and racing to get ahead of traffic before the lanes narrow and sometimes passing in the turn lane.

Another area of surveillance is that hilly, winding stretch of highway between Bee Creek Road, east to Hamilton Pool Road where there have been several fatalities during the last year or so.

There will also be an increased DUI task force, during the evening and on weekends.

So, let's all drive defensively and by all means, SLOW DOWN!!! The posted speed limit on Hwy. 71 in this area is 65 mph. New mandates for issuing speeding tickets allows you to drive just 4 miles over the posted limit and law enforcement is beginning to ticket for ANYTHING above that allowance. The increased Sheriff's deputy presence will be in effect probably through April, depending on funding, and might be expanded.

Thanks for listening!

Richard Scroggins
President, Guardians of Lick Creek