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For more information: Tom Strandberg - (541) 963-1330

Keep safety in mind on U.S. 395 in Hermiston

U.S. 395 though Hermiston sees a lot of traffic. Depending on the specific location of the six mile stretch between the junction of U.S. 730 to the north (at mile post zero) and S.E. 4th Street at the south end of town (mile post six), the average daily traffic count from 2014 data ranged from 10,000 to 20,700 vehicles a day. That averages out to about 16,850 vehicles per day along the corridor, or nearly 12 vehicles passing a given point every minute. For the most part drivers are moving without mishap, but crashes do happen. Some have serious consequences.

ODOT Crash data for the period between 2010 and 2014 (latest statistics) lists a total of 450 crashes that occurred along U.S. 395 between U.S. 730 at mile post zero and mile post 10, just north of Stanfield. Those 450 crashes resulted in two fatalities (2014 and 2010), 15 serious injuries, 90 moderate injuries, and 228 minor injuries. Nearly ninety percent of the crashes occurred between U.S. 730 and S.E. 4th Street. Detailed data for 2015 is not available yet, but numerous crashes have occurred and there has been at least one fatality that resulted from an October 19 crash near Baggett Lane.

“Because of the amount of complaints the Hermiston Police Department gets regarding traffic on Highway 395, in June 2015 we reverted back to having a dedicated traffic officer assigned to a motorcycle,” said Hermiston Chief of Police Jason Edmiston. “They focus predominantly on Highway 395.”

The Hermiston Police motor officer issued 863 citations between June and December of 2015, with the majority pertaining to violations witnessed on U.S. 395.

Most crashes are preventable

Local law enforcement and the Oregon Department of Transportation urge all travelers using the streets and sidewalks along the U.S. 395 corridor and other busy routes to pay extra attention. Turn cell phones off, reduce distractions and be mindful of all other drivers, motorcyclists, pedestrians and bicycle riders.

“Look once, look twice, then look again,” said ODOT Public Information Officer Tom Strandberg. “A quick glance before turning, changing lanes or stepping off the curb is not enough.” “

Of the hundreds of crashes between 2010 and 2014 along this stretch of highway, half listed failure to yield or following too close as primary causes. Twenty percent of the crashes resulted from distracted/inattentive driving, or excessive speed.

Reducing distractions is a key element to safety. Having a cell phone, noisy passengers or other distractions will hamper your ability to pay attention to the road.

“Law enforcement can impact traffic with either education or enforcement,” Edmiston said. “We would much rather educate our citizens that distracted driving as a result of passengers, electronic devices, etc. is preventable.”

Because this stretch of highway is five lanes wide, with two travel lanes in each direction and a middle turn lane, there are a lot of vehicles making turns across multiple lanes. Over half of the crashes between 2010 and 2014 involved turning movements or crashes at an angle. Another 36 percent involved rear end crashes or striking fixed objects.

“Highway 395 through Hermiston is very unique because of the many entrances and exits that exist for the businesses along the corridor,” said Edmiston. “Taking a few extra seconds to continually scan the road while driving, especially before pulling out onto the roadway, will reduce your chances of being involved in a crash.”

Highway Improvements

The Oregon Department of Transportation and the City of Hermiston are aware of the challenges travelers face along U.S. 395. Along with enforcement and education, engineering safety improvements is another tool that can reduce serious crashes. Last summer ODOT installed traffic delineator to help channel turning movements near the Elm Avenue intersections, which has a high number of crashes. This and future changes planned for 2016 will help reduce the number of cross traffic turning movements. Other work along U.S. 395 in 2015 included upgrading many of the traffic signals with video detection controls to improve safety, traffic flow and eliminate the need for detection loops in the pavement.

In 2016 a major project along the route will grind out the old asphalt and inlay about two inches of new pavement along the six mile stretch of U.S. 395 between U.S. 730 and S.E. Fourth Street. Sidewalks will also receive new ADA compliant ramps as part of the project. Much of the paving work will be performed at night to reduce disruptions.

Highway construction projects are also planned this summer on U.S. 730 between Southshore Drive and McNary.

“With the significant construction slated to take place in the next couple years on Highway 395, we would encourage citizens to drive defensively, constantly being aware of their surroundings to include other drivers and pedestrians,” Edmiston said.

“ODOT will continue to work with the City of Hermiston to improve safety, but it is paramount that all motorists, bicyclists and pedestrians take extra caution and be mindful of each other,” Strandberg said.

“Safety is everyone’s responsibility.”

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