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Lane County outlines safety plans for deadly corridor

By Christian Hill

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Lane County outlined Thursday the immediate and future steps it plans to take to improve safety on a busy corridor where a woman was struck and killed by a car four months ago.

The death of Irene Ferguson, 70, on Jan. 17 highlighted the chief safety problem with the Beaver Street-Hunsaker Lane corridor: a narrow, once-rural road with no sidewalks and crosswalks now under the demands of an urban street. Many Randy Papé Beltline motorists use the corridor to connect to River Road to avoid rush-hour tie-ups at the River Road interchange.

The Safe Lane Transportation Coalition and two businesses, Delta Sand and Gravel and Knife River, are working with Lane County to provide “slow down” yard signs and donated reflective vests for assisted-living residents along the corridor. The county, coalition and Lane Transit District’s Point2Point program also are providing pedestrian safety education at assisted-living residential centers in the area.

The county is in line for funding to repave and restripe Hunsaker to provide more room for a walking area — separated from traffic by posts — on both sides of the street in the summer of 2020. The project would include a crosswalk with a pedestrian-activated flashing beacon at Hunsaker and Taito Street. There’s plans for a walking path on the east side of Beaver separated from the street by a planting strip.

County spokeswoman Devon Ashbridge said the county needs to negotiate with landowners to secure some right-of-way for the project, so the project couldn’t happen any faster.

She said the project was already in the pipeline at the time of the January fatal crash.

“This certainly provides additional urgency not only for Lane County but for our other partners knowing there’s been a fatality,” Ashbridge said.

The project, which likely will be built in phases, is expected to cost hundreds of millions of dollars, and ODOT hasn't secured any construction funding. The state agency has scheduled a public open house to provide a project update in early June.

John Hagen, who has lived along the corridor since 1976, agreed to have one of the yard signs placed in his yard. The crash that killed Ferguson occurred in front of his property.

Hagen does have concerns about the potential loss of a portion of his property along the street due to the proposed future widening. But in the meantime, he said, "whatever they can do to help is good."

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