

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In March of 2008 the New Orleans Regional Planning Commission (RPC) selected Buchart Horn, Inc. to prepare a Stage "0" Planning and Feasibility Study on US 61 (Airline Highway) between Magnolia Street and Old US 51/Main Street/LA Hwy 44, located in St. John the Baptist Parish. The objective of the study was to identify alternatives that increase capacity and safety throughout the project corridor ranging approximately 2.0 miles in LaPlace, Louisiana. The construction of additional lanes throughout the reach of this project would not be feasible to implement at one time due to construction costs, safety concerns, and planning issues. Also, LA DOTD restricts the construction of a 5-lane section of roadway utilizing the center lane as a continuous shared left turn lane. Resulting from current traffic data modeled using VISSIM software, three major intersections were selected by St. John the Baptist Parish to provide improvements and Transportation System Management (TSM) measures. Due to "abnormal" classifications stemming from large number of accidents, access management planning utilizing raised medians was incorporated into the development of each alternative. The addition of the raised medians required the widening of US 61 at the approaches of each intersection. To facilitate the widening and maintenance of adequate drainage, the existing shoulders were used incorporating curb and gutters. This allowed all proposed improvement measures along US 61 to be within LA DOTD rights of way.

US 61 at Belle Terre Blvd.

Based on the information gathered throughout the analysis, widening of US 61 allowed adequate room for the installation of a raised median and double left turn lanes from US 61 to Belle Terre Boulevard. This provided increased capacity and improved the Level of Service (LOS) on the northbound approach. Access onto US 61 between Elm Street and Belle Terre Boulevard is limited forcing right turns from all existing drives requiring any left turns to occur at the signalized intersections.

US 61 at Hemlock St.

The alternative development increased the capacity of Hemlock Street by widening between the railroad tracks and US 61. The addition of a new designated right turn lane in the northbound direction allowed the existing right turn lane to become a designated thru movement to Carrollwood Drive improving the existing "mis"alignment across US 61. This improvement requires property acquisition and utility relocation along the eastern portion of Hemlock Street.

US 61 at US 51 and Old US 51/Main St./LA Hwy 44

The stretch of US 61 approaching LA Hwy 44 and US 51 from the east was heavily traveled during peak hours by commuters working or residing in St. John the Baptist, St. Charles, Jefferson, and Orleans Parishes. The transportation system management measure increased capacity by adding a designated right turn lane decreasing the amount of time in queue along US 61 in the westbound direction throughout the two intersections.

Recommendations

It is our recommendation that when considering portions of US 61 throughout the project corridor, emphasis be placed on the following intersections:

- 1) US 61 at Belle Terre Blvd.
- 2) US 61 at Hemlock St.
- 3) US 61 at US 51 and Old US 51/Main St./LA Hwy 44.

Each Transportation System Management measure considers access management procedures and capacity improvements. By constructing separate projects under one long-term goal, the entire reach can function as a whole. We have reached this conclusion based upon the results of this analysis focusing on the safety and well being of the community.