Ambassador Caffery Parkway
hot point of Lafayette construction

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LAFAYETTE — You would think it could almost be 1980 and the oil boom all over again. Ambassador Caffery Parkway in Lafayette is bustling with new business construction and the promise of traffic jams.

This year, Home Depot will construct a 130,000-square-foot building at Caffery and Robley Drive, and Sports Unlimited will build near that. The electronics and appliance chain Circuit City is scheduled to build between Lowe's and Target in Acadiana Square.

The Kmart Corp. is constructing a 206,000-square-foot store to be called Super K, at Caffery and Ridge.

Future and present construction follows two big projects completed in 1993 — a new Wal-Mart and an Albertson's grocery store opened on Caffery.

Then there are the smaller businesses: Books-A-Million will build in Acadiana Square; T.J. Applebee's opened on Johnston Street near Caffery; and Barraecas', an Italian restaurant, is packed daily.

Developer Dwight Andrus of Lafayette said he believes development along Caffery parallels a national trend for large chain operations building next to one another on heavily trafficked roads.

Ambassador Caffery, named for Jefferson Caffery of Lafayette, is on the city's southwestern end. The street became a commercial center
with the opening in 1979 of the Acadiana Mall. That was followed by the development of Ambassador Row shopping center, a Target department store and Lowe’s, in the early 1980s.

With the success come headaches for people like Dean Tekell, traffic engineer for the city of Lafayette.

Home Depot and Super K are including turn lanes in their construction plans, Tekell said.

Home Depot, with Andrus helping, will construct a turn lane off Ambassador Caffery, and will extend the right turn lane on Robley Drive at its intersection with Caffery, he said. Additionally, Home Depot will build a left turn lane from Robley to Caffery, Tekell said.

Super K, which will operate 24 hours a day, will build a right turn lane from Ridge Road to Caffery, and a turn lane from Ridge onto its parking lot, Tekell said. Also, the city will modify the traffic signal at Ridge and Caffery to include a left turn signal, he said.

There is still no plan for a turn lane from Caffery onto the Wal-Mart parking lot, said Tekell. The lane was omitted during the approval of the development, he said.

Caffery has other, more pressing, long-term problems, Tekell said.

“In my opinion, the key capital improvements we need to be looking at are the intersections of Johnston Street and Ambassador Caffery,” he said.

He said an overpass or underpass is needed to alleviate a major traffic problem for the city. Also, Tekell said Caffery needs to be five-laned at Interstate 10, and a new interchange built where the roads intersect.