BR traffic to worsen in southeast

Study: 2 complexes would further degrade conditions

By MIKE DUNNE

Residents in the southeastern part of the parish already facing long delays at intersections will find traffic getting worse, according to a recent traffic study.

After development which has already received permits to build are complete, the traffic conditions will degrade even further, the study said.

Add two proposed controversial apartment complexes and almost all intersections "fail" unless a long, expensive list of suggested traffic lights and turning lanes are added.

The study was done at the direction of the Planning Commission, which has wrestled with whether to approve proposed St. Jean Apartments and the Coursey Gardens Apartments.

Both developers have sued the city-parish, asking the courts to order officials to give them permits. The traffic study could strengthen the city-parish's position in each case.

St. Jean developer Stewart Juneau sued parish officials in state court and is appealing the lower court decision upholding the city-parish's refusal to give his project a building permit.

He has also filed a fair housing discrimination complaint against the parish for rejecting his project.

After months of delay, the traffic study was unveiled at the commission meeting last week, when the commission rejected Coursey Gardens on a 4-3 vote.

The traffic study shows problems currently exist even without taking the projects into account.

"Basically, the intersections are the problem. The roadways in between were okay," Traffic Engineer Dwight Fox told the commission.

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Southeastern Baton Rouge traffic study

A study of intersections in the southeastern part of the parish (map on left) shows that several key intersections are unacceptable and receive a grade of F. If all development with building permits are completed, and two major apartment complexes are built, several intersections will fail to be adequate, and the rest will be only marginally acceptable, (map on right).

- Stop sign
  Grade of F with unacceptable delays
- Traffic light
  Grade of A, B or C with acceptable delays
- Traffic light
  Grade of D or E with marginally acceptable delays
- Traffic light
  Grade of F with unacceptable delays

Existing conditions

Conditions with projected development

Source: EBR Traffic Engineering
Traffic

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“If we can move the traffic through the intersections, we have the capacity to handle them,” he said.

The study focused on the area bounded by Interstate 12 on the north, Sherwood Forest Boulevard on the west, Tiger Bend Road on the south and O’Neal Lane on the east.

The study was prompted by concern about the impact of the St. Jean and Coursey Gardens projects.

The St. Jean Apartments would be 620-units fronting on Harrell’s Ferry Road just east of the O’Neal Lane intersection.

Coursey Gardens Apartments would be a 200-unit complex off of George O’Neal Road between O’Neal Lane and Jones Creek.

The Planning Commission voted 4-3 last week to deny a site plan approval sought by developer Clark Taylor.

The study was conducted for Fox by the engineering firm of HNTB Architects, Engineers and Planners.

Intersections were given a grade of “A” through “F” based on the average length of delay, with “E” being the limit of acceptable delay and “F” as unacceptable.

The study used traffic light signal colors to show good (A-C) as green, marginal (D-E) as yellow and failure (F) as red.

The study also looked at the impact of the apartment complexes and what would happen with seven intersection improvements, which included more turning lanes and replacing some stop signs with traffic signals.

Fox’s assessment was that Coursey Gardens Apartments “does not cause any widespread additional problem, but it does have some impact” on George O’Neal Road, O’Neal Lane and O’Neal Lane at Harrell’s Ferry. O’Neal-Harrell’s Ferry becomes a failure.

If just the St. Jean Apartments are built — meaning not Coursey Gardens and the seven improvements were not made — “there is no longer any green on the map,” Fox told the commission.

If both apartment projects were built and the list of seven improvements made, it would be possible to eliminate all the failures, although there would still be more yellow than green.

The improvements would be costly.

Some Planning Commission Members were ready to approve Coursey Gardens if the developer pledged $25,000 to improve the George O’Neal-O’Neal intersection.

The costs of improving intersections vary, according to acting Public Works Director Fred Raiford.

He estimated improvements at George O’Neal and O’Neal would run about $180,000-$200,000. Some of the intersection improvements proposed would cost as much as $300,000, Raiford said.