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Serious accidents spur study Route 13 at Brown Road: Danger Awaits

ANDREW TUTINO
Journal Staff

LANSING -- On any other GrassRoots weekend, Trumansburg resident Patricia Bonsall would be visiting the festival to listen to the music and meet up with friends.

Today, however, she won't be there. She'll be about a mile away at her home, sitting in a wheelchair.

Bonsall suffered serious injuries on April 8, when trying to make a righthand turn from Brown Road in the Village of Lansing onto State Route 13.

On April 30, a second accident with serious injuries occurred at the same intersection.

While never labeled a dangerous intersection, that area -- including the Route 13 intersection with Sapsucker Woods Road, the home of Cornell University's Lab of Ornithology -- will become the focus of a traffic study by the New York State Department of Transportation.

Tony Ilacqua, assistant to the director for the Department of Transportation's Syracuse-based Region 3, said there was never a request for a study to be done on the Brown Road intersection until Bonsall wrote a letter following her accident. Now, he said, traffic engineers will study the area to see if improvements can be made. More than 20 years ago, traffic safety consultant Paul Sheridan and two colleagues conducted a study of Brown Road when Cornell's business park was being discussed.



SIMON WHEELER/Journal Staff

A motorist waits to exit Brown Road at State Route 13 as a string of cars drives toward Warren Road at midday Friday. A pair of serious accidents in April of this year has led to state transportation department study of the intersection.

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The study highlighted the potentially dangerous traffic patterns at the intersection, patterns that Sheridan said have become only worse as traffic has increased in the area.

Sheridan said many improvements can be made immediately to the intersection to ensure traffic safety.

Among the problems:

- The 55 miles per hour speed limit on Route 13 is too high for the current intersection;
- Drivers on either Brown Road or Sapsucker Woods Road are in a low-speed "mental mode" and frequently do not anticipate the quickness of the approach to the intersection by Route 13 traffic.

"In my hard-won safety management experience, I have never seen a wait-and-see approach accomplish anything except injury and death," Sheridan said.

Sheridan is advocating for a reduced speed limit in the area and the elimination of passing lanes on Route 13 from Warren Road north to Brown Road and Sapsucker Woods Road.

"It is virtually impossible to pass with any measure of safety on that stretch of Route 13," Sheridan said.

Sheridan said those short-term solutions would go a long way toward preventing accidents such as Bonsall's. Ultimately, he said, a traffic study should be done to come up with long-term solutions.

"I just know the intersection is no good," he said. "How rapidly do you think the safety of Brown Road would be improved if a Cornell or Lansing official was an accident injury or accident death victim?"

Bonsall said she remembers the day of her accident vividly. Her office had recently moved to Thornwood Drive, inside the Cornell business park.

"It was new to me to use that road," she said.

She waited at the stop sign before making a right-hand turn and as she was turning onto Route 13, she saw something out of the corner of her eye.

"I knew I was going to get hit," she said.

Bonsall's injuries included broken ribs, a bruised heart, a broken left leg that now has rods and pins holding it together, and a large gash on her head that required 12 staples to close. She is in a wheelchair now but her doctor believes she will be walking again next year.

"I am lucky to be alive," Bonsall said. "I really think something needs to be done at that intersection. If my injuries mean saving someone else, I would be happy."

Bonsall said she rarely used the Brown Road turn onto Route 13 to leave

work, and normally would take Warren Road to Route 13, using the two traffic lights --one at the business park entrance and one at the intersection of Route 13 and Warren Road.

"Before I left that day, I was toying with the idea of going around the longer way with the light," she said. "It's a conscious decision I regret now."

Ithaca Tompkins Regional Airport General Manager Robert Nicholas said he is aware of the concern at the intersection and there have been talks about installing a traffic safety device or allowing only emergency vehicles to have access to the road, forcing all traffic out via Warren Road.


"Route 13 is a very busy road," Nicholas said. "It is the main artery for Ithaca and because of the additional use of it, people have to sometimes sit there for long periods of time to find a hole in the traffic. If you pull out too quickly, you can have a serious accident there."

John E. Majeroni, director of Cornell Real Estate, which runs the business park, said he welcomes the state study of the area. In the past, he said, many issues have been discussed about the traffic patterns surrounding the business park.

Village of Lansing Planning Board Chairman Ned Hickey said there has never been a request for a study until now, despite concerns over traffic there.

"We certainly support the idea of a traffic study," he said. "There has been a traffic accident and certain things can change based on the result of the traffic study. I think it is good the state is looking at that section of Brown Road."

Contact: atutino@ithaca.gannett.com.

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