

## FDOT DISTRICT TWO

Intelligent Transportation Systems Newsletter –  
May 2011  
Issue 43

Sunrise from over the  
Buckman looking east



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## ITS Announcements

<b>Alachua TIM Meeting</b>	Gainesville Operations Office	06/08/2011- 10am
<b>ITS America/World Congress</b>	Orlando, Florida	10/16-10/20/2011

*Please contact the ITS Office at (904) 360-5465 if you would like to participate in the meetings.*

## Notes from the District 2 ITS Engineer

The District Two ITS office is now in overdrive mode for the next few years thanks to several new interstate projects and partnership efforts with a number of local agencies.

The top project on our list is the new Regional Transportation Management Center (RTMC) that has construction budget available beginning July 2012. If you recall, this was the facility that would incorporate multi-agency cooperation on a daily basis for the management of the region's transportation network. The initial plan involved an RTMC that would house FHP dispatch personnel, FDOT 511/Operations staff, City of Jacksonville Traffic Signal personnel, one to two Jacksonville Sheriff dispatchers and one or two Fire/Rescue dispatchers. We must now revisit this original plan to insure that all the agencies are still on board with moving personnel to this facility. As of January, we had commitments from FHP, the Department and City of Jacksonville.

The ITS office has also begun the homestretch of its deployments with the Phase VII project along State Road 9A and Phase VIII project along I-295. Two contractors are on board for these deployments with projected completion dates during the Summer of 2012. If you recall, both installations are using the System's Manager approach and our office is very excited to begin the integration portion of these projects. The final

deployment, Phase IX, is moving along with great expectations. The location of this project is on the southeast section of State Road 9A and will be our first where the deployment of ITS devices will also be on the arterial as well as interstate system.

The Phase IX project is unique in that it not only incorporates the deployment of devices for the daily management of traffic along the interstate but also for arterials used to access the interstate. This way, we can divert arterial traffic away from the interstate thus reducing the impact on traffic due to an incident. This project will also provide the opportunity to distribute traffic around Jacksonville during the evacuation of beach residents, thereby reducing the impact along the four lane section of State Road 9A.

One final note to share is that this is the first project where we incorporated the needs of large traffic generators along the corridor. The goal is to begin developing public/private partnerships that will assist with the management of traffic on a daily basis.

Our office is also beginning to look at the latest in ITS devices that can improve staff performance with the use of multiple agency technologies. The first item on our agenda is finding a video wall controller that not only allows us to continue

### Notes from the D2 ITS Engineer continued

displaying our MPEG-2 video but also the local agency MPEG-4 and H.264 video. Currently, we have to install additional equipment to accomplish the task, however our expenditures and daily maintenance issues can be significantly reduced with this new technology. Likewise, we are beginning to examine the latest in network switch technology that allows us to dynamically change components as the ITS network grows.

The North Florida TPO projects are full steam ahead with the first purchase of Bluetooth technology that will help in monitoring the daily performance of the arterial roadway system. This is critical to our operations staff since it will allow them to make an educated determination on when to move Interstate traffic onto arterial roads when major incidents occur. They will be able to post alternate routes on the Dynamic Message Signs as well as on the 511 system. Our first deployment will be along Philips Highway from I-95 at the north end to I-295 near the Avenues Mall. I expect the field installation to take less than one day and hope to begin collecting data by the last week of June.

Another project that's currently being advertised is for the purchase of Road Weather Information System devices. This is the project that will allow us to use NOAA satellites over the Gulf of Mexico to transmit bridge wind speed data to our TMC

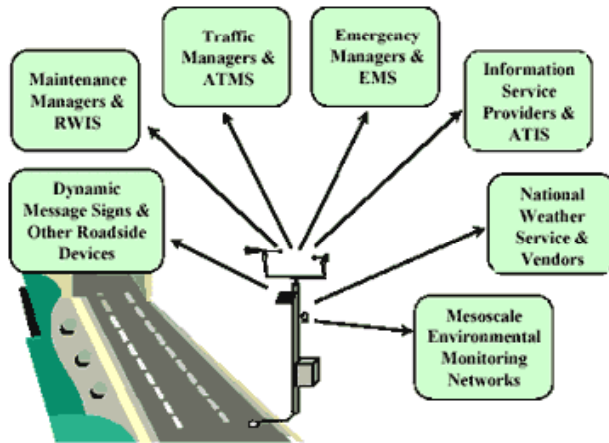
and local law enforcement. When severe weather approaches, law enforcement will be able to use this data to determine where to deploy officers and when to close the bridges to traffic. Likewise, the TMC operations staff can monitor the data and can disseminate possible bridge closure information ahead of time to motorists via Dynamic Message Signs and the 511 system. We expect to begin purchasing devices in June and will initiate deployment in July and August.

The excitement does not end in Northeast Florida but actually spans to the Alachua County region. As mentioned in a previous newsletter, Gainesville is now fully operational in their new TMC. They have upgraded a majority of their traffic signal cabinets and installed CCTV cameras. The next step in their deployment is the purchase/installation of vehicle detectors and arterial dynamic message signs. The Gainesville Traffic Signal staff is completing the draft of the advertisement and should begin deployment within the year. One of the benefits to our office is their plan to also install CCTV cameras along the I-75 corridor within the Gainesville city limits. This will allow our staff to monitor video of traffic along the interstate using a VPN access the City has provided. We will also be able to assist their staff during major events like Florida Gator football games by monitoring their CCTV cameras and posting messages on the 511 system.

Notes from the D2 ITS Engineer continued

As you can see, we are now pushing the pedal to the metal as the final pieces of the region's ITS Architecture are put together. We can now begin to incorporate the needs of the seaport, airport, fire/rescue, hospitals and large traffic generators into the program by dynamically providing traffic information to each of our partners. The goal is that by 2015 the system becomes one homogenous network that allows us to improve traffic flows to the fullest capability while helping to reduce accidents and injuries to a minimum.

Pete Vega  
District 2 ITS Engineer



An example of Road Weather Information System

The Lighter Side

Every summer our kids humor us by letting us whisk them away to some Caribbean island where they then fall prey to our feeble attempts at playing tour guide. And every year my parents volunteer to keep them stateside while my husband and I trek through uninhabited parts of the island looking for adventure. But we need new memories to add to our family scrapbook, so we make the kids go with us.

Just last summer we visited the island of St. Croix and decided to take an hour long hike into the rainforest. Little did we know the map we were given hadn't been updated since Christopher Columbus first discovered the island in 1493. We stumbled back onto the grounds of our resort FOUR HOURS later, exhausted and nursing a few wounds, but not before we saw some pretty incredible sights. Tidal pools that would take your breath away, beehives as big as boulders, centipedes that measured 2 feet in length (and were extremely poisonous we later learned) and these bright red crabs that we affectionately started calling the "somersaulting crabs," because they would curl up into a tight little ball and catapult themselves down the hillside.

At one point on our climb the temps were pushing 100 degrees. Then out of nowhere a massive thunderstorm rolled in and drenched us in rain, leaving us shivering with cold. Yes, we were exhausted after our ordeal, but our girls later

### The Lighter Side continued

admitted (after a warm bath and with the t.v. remote tucked away in their hands) it was one of the best adventures we'd ever taken them on. They put way too much faith in us.

Then there was the time we visited the Dutch island of Curacao and arranged for our own private transportation through one of the locals. We met Ernesta at the airport, the only female driver in a sea of men, competing for her daily spot in the lineup. We immediately fell in love with her. Driving to our hotel some 40 minutes away, we rocked out to Hispanic praise music in her beat up old van. She told us stories about her children and grandchildren. We told her stories about life back in the States. She quickly became our newest friend on this unfamiliar island.

We had a lovely week-long stay, and when it was time to head back to the airport for our return flight home, we waited for Ernesta by the side of the road as previously arranged. And we waited. And waited. Worried we might miss our flight, we called Ernesta at home, startling her awake from her afternoon nap. "Oh, *this* Friday," Ernesta says into the receiver. "OK, I come now." On the way to the airport, I listened to the right rear tire of Ernesta's van "thump-thump-thump" with every 90 degree turn we made, hugging the mountain on one side and facing a sheer drop to the ocean on the other. My mother's words kept echoing through my head, "Let us keep the kids for you."

Somehow we made our flight. And added a new memory to the family scrapbook.

Then eight years ago on a remote stretch of beach in the Dominican Republic, a shopkeeper in one of the little huts started stroking my hair while saying to my husband, "I like your wife very much." To my husband's credit he didn't say, "Name your price." Instead, he grabbed me and the girls (who were only 6 and 4 at the time) and whisked us out of there as fast as possible. Although we did end up buying a little bobble-headed turtle from him because the girls just couldn't live without it.

Next month we'll set off on another adventure. This time to Puerto Rico where we plan to zipline through the rainforest. But we'll have a tour guide... and a map that was made in this century. Wish us luck. On second thought, don't bother. We need a new memory for the family scrapbook.

Sherri Byrd  
511 Marketing Manager



One of those giant centipedes of the Caribbean

## Performance Measures

When first reviewing the Performance Measures for May, it was noted that the daily crash rates for I-75 and I-95 were substantially lower than previous month's averaged daily crash rates. Therefore, we proceeded to review the sources of the data. During this review, we found that our alerts from Florida Highway Patrol's (FHP) Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD) were not functioning for 10 days during the month. This appears to have been the cause for the reduced number of crashes that had been inputted into SunGuide®. However, although it would be optimal to have all incidents accounted for when doing the Performance Measures for the month of May, it is felt that we do have enough data available to provide an accurate representation of the Performance Measures for the month.

The Open Roads duration and roadway clearance durations are currently longer in May than the average of previous months. The primary reason for this was a RISC event that occurred on May 13<sup>th</sup> on I-75 at MM 392. This RISC event involved a crash between two tractor-trailers and one other vehicle that occurred at approximately 1 am. Unfortunately, due to a large fuel spill and the time that was required for the Fire Department to remove all of the fuel from the tractor-trailer, all lanes of traffic were closed for approximately 2 hours, with the first lane being opened at approximately 3:17 am. An hour later, all lanes

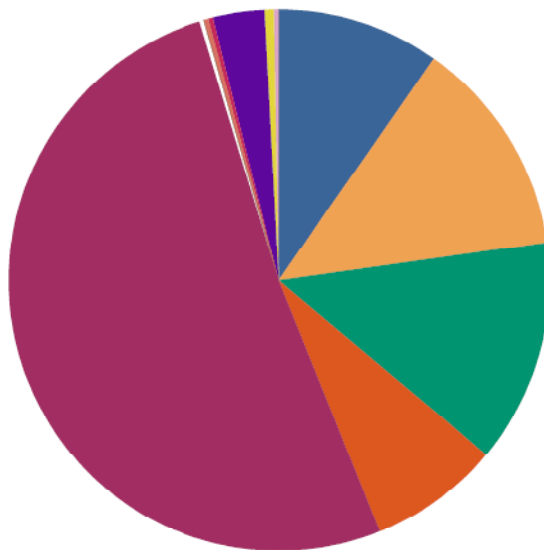
were opened and the event was closed out of SunGuide® at 4:16am; making the Open Roads Duration a little over 3 hours long.

TMC Operations continues to enjoy the benefits of the Smart Phone Application for Road Rangers (SPARR). The operators agree that radio chatter has been reduced by more than 70 percent. This new tool has advanced beyond our wildest expectations. That said, there is always room for improvement and there are some adjustments that are being made in operations to ensure accurate reporting from the SPARR to the SunGuide reports. One such adjustment is that the Road Rangers sometimes enter duplicate activities in error. This may be due to lack of cellular service or simply an accidental second tap. Either way, to identify these duplicate entries, a new report was created that lists all occasions where an event was duplicated. The information in this report can be used to audit the SunGuide reports as necessary, which will enable Operations personnel to rectify any errors.

The chart below depicts the total number of events included in the Performance Measures analysis for the months of April and May, while the pie chart depicts the various types of events that represent the total number of events for May to date.

Performance Measures continued

	April	May
Events included in Performance Measures	270	111
Notification Duration (min.)*	0.1	0.2
Verification Duration (min.)	0.5	0.8
Response Duration (min.)	8.9	4.6
Open Roads Duration (min.)	30.3	41.8
Departure Duration (min.)	34.4	29.1
<b>Roadway Clearance Duration (min.)</b>	<b>39.7</b>	<b>47.4</b>
<b>Incident Clearance Duration (min.)</b>	<b>74.2</b>	<b>76.5</b>



Abandoned Vehicle	9.6%
Congestion	13.2%
Crash	13.4%
Debris on Roadway	7.7%
Disabled Vehicle	51.6%
Emergency Road Work	0.1%
Off Ramp Backup	0.0%
Other	0.4%
Pedestrian	0.0%
Police Activity	0.2%
Scheduled Road Work	3.2%
Vehicle Alert	0.4%
Vehicle Fire	0.3%
Visibility	0.0%
Weather	0.0%
Total:	100.0%

Jill Dawson  
Metric Engineering



### Road Ranger Update

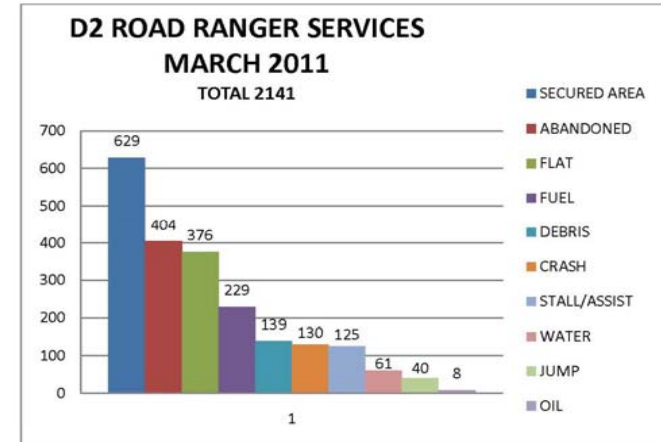
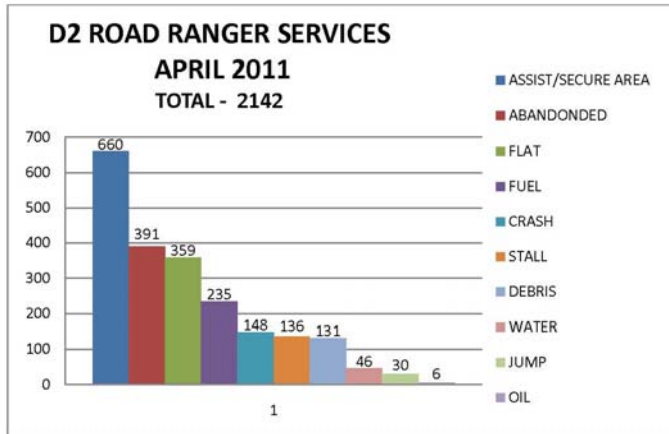
Two thousand forty-two motorists were assisted by our First Coast Road Ranger Operators in the month of April 2011. Assistance with these incidents by the Rangers greatly diminishes the amount of time our travel lanes are impacted creating a safer outcome. Road Ranger Operators continue to be a great asset to our Traffic Incident Management Program. There is continued progress in the use of the Smart Phones between the Traffic Management Center (TMC) and the Road Ranger Operators. In the near future we will be documenting all information and reports via our SunGuide software helping us “go green” while expediting time spent on incident scenes.

### RISC – RAPID INCIDENT SCENE CLEARANCE – UPDATE

On May 17<sup>th</sup>, a debrief meeting was conducted to discuss the successful RISC incident occurring April 4, 2011 on 9A NB at the Dames Point Bridge.

Our RISC Contractors – Southern Wrecker, Walt’s Wrecker, John’s Towing and University Towing – remain ready to activate if needed.

Donna R. Danson  
 FDOT District 2  
 ITS Operations  
 Program Manager



**Traffic Incident Management (TIM) Update**

**FIRST COAST TIM TEAM UPDATE**

The First Coast Traffic Incident Management Team met on May 17th at 10:00 AM at the FDOT Urban Office Training Center, 2198 Edison Avenue.

The following agencies were represented: City of Jacksonville Traffic Operations, Nassau County Engineering, FDEP, FDOT Maintenance, Jorgensens, Transfield Services, DBI Services, FHP, St. Johns County Sheriff’s Office, JTA, JFRD/EPD, FDOT Public Information Office, John’s Towing, Walt’s Wrecker Service, Nassau County Sheriff’s Office, City of Jacksonville Environmental, Total Traffic – TMC, Metric Engineering, and FDOT ITS.

After agency reports and a debriefing of past incidents, Mrs. Dawn Williams with the Jacksonville Fire Rescue Department/ EPD gave a presentation on the City’s WebEOC.

**ALACHUA TIM TEAM UPDATE**

The Alachua Traffic Management Team will meet at 10:00 AM on June 8th at the Gainesville Operations Office, 5301 NE 39<sup>th</sup> Avenue. Your participation is important as we are battling wildfires and preparing for the hurricane season. Also, Team members are in the process of developing an *Alachua Team Newsletter*.

*District 2 TRAFFIC INCIDENT MANAGEMENT TEAM MISSION:*

*The Florida Department of Transportation District Two’s Traffic Incident Management Teams through partnering efforts strive to continuously reduce incident scene clearance times to deter Congestion and improve safety. The Teams’ objective is to exceed the Open Roads Policy thus ensuring mobility, economic prosperity, and quality of life.*

*District 2 TRAFFIC INCIDENT MANAGEMENT TEAM VISION:*

*Through cooperation, communication and training the Teams intend to reduce incident scene clearance times by 10% each year through 2015.*

Donna R. Danson  
 FDOT District 2  
 ITS Operations  
 Program Manager



## North Florida TPO Update

As mentioned earlier, an initial 100 Bluetooth devices have been ordered with an expected delivery date of mid-June. Once the devices are received the ITS office will begin to configure each with network information. This should take less than one day. It is then out to the field where we anticipate an installation time of 15 minutes per location. The first corridor to have these devices installed will be Philips Highway.

The process, after installation, is five minutes to check communication, two minutes to determine if the data is reaching the website and about five minutes to allow the data to smooth out before we go to the next location. I anticipate one day of work for the deployment of Bluetooth devices along Philips Highway.

Once the deployment is completed along this corridor the City, FDOT, FHP and local Planning Office will be able to dynamically collect data along Philips Highway. The devices will provide travel times and vehicle speeds within the limits of deployment. This will be combined with the data collection capabilities of the detectors for the traffic signal controllers that can provide volumes. The final piece of vital information (for the Planning Office) is the origin/destination data. Put together, this gives everyone the capability to manage and study traffic along Philips Highway throughout the entire urban corridor.

The Road Weather Information System contract is now advertised. Since there are only a handful of NOAA certified vendors we shortened the length of the advertisement to expedite purchasing prior to the end of this fiscal year (June 30<sup>th</sup>). Since the type of devices being purchased are mainly “off the shelf” for these vendors it should be a matter of weeks between the order and delivery. The game plan is to receive the devices, configure them at the office and then have local agencies assist in the installation at the bridges. Once installed, the vendor will help with proper alignment of the satellite transmitter to the NOAA satellites over the Gulf of Mexico. It should take approximately one-hour after proper alignment for us to begin collecting wind data from the device.

The North Florida TPO organized a team of law enforcement, transportation and emergency management personnel to set criteria for the use of this data. A study was performed by their consultant, HNTB, which set two-tier criteria for bridge closures involving high and low profile vehicles. The team agreed on the concept and the next step is to provide sample data and the spreadsheet format for their review. We hope to have at least five bridge deployments completed prior to the end of Hurricane season but may be able to accomplish more once the lessons learned have been mastered.

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North Florida TPO Update continued

We are currently wrapping up the NFTPO project along State Road 15 and have finally begun the design of the Philips Highway deployment. American Lighting is the contractor for this project and has high aspirations for completing this project within the allotted amount of time. Once this project is complete the Department and City of Jacksonville can begin to distribute north and southbound traffic between Philips Highway and I-95 via messages on the DMS. This concept was part of what was presented in the DRIP study done by HNTB for the North Florida TPO.

Pete Vega  
District 2 ITS Engineer



Construction

The Phase VII Project, on SR 9A between the SR 9A/I-95 northern Interchange and Atlantic Blvd, is under contract. The Contractor has begun receiving conduit at their lay down yard and is anticipating start of construction within the next few weeks. This project is highly anticipated by the ITS group, as the continued expansion of JaxPort will bring increased truck traffic to this corridor. During the design phase of this project, additional conduit and a pull box were added so that a connection between the FDOT fiber optic cable and JaxPort fiber optic cable could occur. This sharing of data between JaxPort and FDOT will provide valuable insight into the traffic conditions for operators, motorists and truck drivers alike; potentially mitigating some of the congestion along the corridor.

The Phase VIII Project, I-295 between I-95 and I-10, has been awarded to Hinson Electric. Hinson Electric is expected to begin construction in the next few months and has already begun submitting their materials for approval under this contract. This project will complete the ITS System on I-295 and will connect to the existing ITS System and the Phase VII Project at the Northern I-295/I-95/SR 9A Interchange. Many trucking companies have their offices and yards along this corridor and will benefit from the traffic information they receive from this expanded network as they are traveling to and from JaxPort.

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## Construction continued

The Phase IX Project Designer has submitted the 90% Plan Submittal. The project limits are on SR 9A between Atlantic Blvd and the Southern I-95/SR 9A Interchange. FDOT will be reviewing the 90% submittal over the next month and will provide comments to the Designer. This project is the only remaining funded ITS Project on the freeway ITS System around Jacksonville and will be important since it will close the network ring around the City. In addition, this project will provide traveler information to the motorists coming from Jacksonville Beach, UNF, Town Center, as well as other major business and residential areas.

The US 17 Project, with project limits from Collins Road in Duval County to Creighton Road in Clay County, is nearing completion. Currently, the Contractor is completing minor punch list items while the system continues its "Burn-in" period. This project has installed Arterial Dynamic Message Signs and CCTV cameras along US 17 throughout the project area, which has provided Clay County, the Town of Orange Park, City of Jacksonville and FDOT with the ability to monitor traffic and provide traveler information to motorists along the corridor. This corridor is one of the most heavily traveled in the area due to the location of NAS Jax at the northern end of the project. With ITS and advanced signal controllers now installed along both SR 21 and US 17 commuters will have access to significantly more real time traffic information to determine their route to work.

The US 1 Project, from just South of SR 9A heading north into Jacksonville, has been awarded to the team of American Lighting and Kimley Horn. This project is currently under design and 90% plans will be submitted soon. The project will install Arterial Dynamic Message Signs and CCTV cameras along the corridor in an effort to minimize traffic congestion in the area by allowing for enhanced signal timing and faster alerts to responding agencies. In addition, District 2 ITS and the City of Jacksonville Traffic Section are looking into making this section of road into a Smart Highway Corridor. This would mean that when traffic congestion occurs on I-95, FDOT would provide motorists with information letting them know that US 1 is currently a faster route to their destination. This would also happen in reverse, such that if US 1 is congested, motorists would be told that I-95 is currently a faster route.

Finally, this process would also occur during lane closures on Interstate 95 or US 1. To facilitate this "Corridor Integration", coordination will take place between District 2 ITS and COJ Traffic to notify motorists and to dynamically change the signal timings on US 1 to allow for additional traffic to flow through the area of the diversion route.

John Kell  
District 2 ITS Construction Project Manager

## Maintenance

Last month, we discussed that the Phase IV ITS Project Area (I-95, north of I-10) had been handed over to the District's ITS Maintenance Contractor, TCD. We are happy to report that this transition has resulted in an improvement in the availability of the ITS devices for this section; in this case, averaging over 92% availability in April. For the month of May, we are hoping that we will have over 95% of the ITS system devices available in this area. This would be quite an accomplishment, since for the past year; we have been striving to stay above 90% device availability system wide.

Another item that was discussed in last month's Newsletter was that TCD had installed the conduit to create a fiber optic connection between the SR 21 (Blanding Boulevard) ATMS communications network and the Clay County Sheriff's Office. The fiber optic cable was installed this month and within the next few weeks the fibers will be terminated at both ends to allow the SR 21 ATMS network to communicate with the Clay County Sheriff's Office. Once this link is completed and the network pieces are in place, the Clay County Sheriff's Office will be able to control the ADMs (Arterial Dynamic Message Signs) and CCTV cameras along Blanding Boulevard, while being able to view the CCTV camera images. This will be extremely beneficial for arterial operations,

since currently the Blanding Boulevard ADMs and CCTVs can only be controlled and monitored during normal business hours from Clay County's Traffic Signal office.

The final follow up from last month's Newsletter, is the discussion regarding the upcoming wireless connection to CR 210 from I-95 in St. Johns County. As discussed, the initial intent was to utilize a repeater station for this connection. Before spending these additional funds, we decided to attempt this connection without the repeater, even though we were aware that there were several trees in the way.

Although we were able to obtain a signal through the trees, the video quality was poor enough that we decided to utilize the repeater pole as we had initially planned. The wireless equipment for the repeater station installation has been received and we are now awaiting a pole mounted cabinet and solar panel to complete the installation. Once this installation is completed, District 2 ITS will have CCTV camera coverage at CR 210 and I-95. This coverage will assist TMC operations in monitoring traffic for incidents and congestion.

In addition, District 2 will also be connected to the St. Johns County's network so that data and video sharing can occur between the TMC and St. Johns County.

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**Maintenance continued**

The Maintenance Team continues to test new ITS devices. This month we received a new firmware version for the Cohu cameras that we have been testing. This firmware update has improved the control for focusing the camera and we continue to test the cameras other features.

Finally, TCD performed some tree trimming around CCTV cameras this month in order to allow for better viewing of the surrounding area. The Maintenance Team has also been doing normal routine and preventative maintenance items when not working on our “special projects.” All of our work continues to be done in an effort to make the ITS System as reliable and as effective as possible in order to provide the best real time traffic information possible to our operators as well as motorists.

Kevin Jackson  
District 2 ITS Field Specialist



[www.fl511.com](http://www.fl511.com)

**Marketing**

As usual, our 511 Marketing Team has gone above and beyond the call of duty during this busy festival season. We started things off in beautiful downtown Fernandina at this year’s Isle of Eight Flags Shrimp Festival. We spoke to over 1,000 people during the 2-day event and were lucky enough to have Captain Jack Sparrow stop by for a visit. Local artists and food vendors lined the downtown streets and treated festival-goers to both culinary treats and eye-catching artwork. The 511 program is always a big hit at the festival because of the increased traffic flow on I-95 and State Road A1A leading into and out of the event.

Then it was on to Blue Cross and Blue Shield for their annual Hurricane Safety Awareness Expo. In just 3 hours, we talked one-on-one with over FOUR HUNDRED of their employees. Traffic is often delayed during critical drive times on both I-95 and Butler Boulevard near their southside campus. A lot of their employees have even signed up for our free traffic alert messaging system. This way, they can receive alerts via text message or email letting them know about problems on their preferred route to/from work without having to get stuck in the traffic backup.

Our next stop was the Shadco Safety Fair sponsored by the Jacksonville Sheriff’s Office. It was held at the Regency Square Mall and featured both indoor and outdoor exhibits. Multiple rescue



**Marketing continued**

and emergency vehicles were on hand as well as various government agencies and private vendors. Judging by the looks on the kids' faces, everyone was having a blast!

Our last big hooray for the month was the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Dancin' in the Street. The event is always held in the little town center where Atlantic and Neptune Beaches come together. Local bands take the stage and vendors line the streets. And wherever there's empty space, well, that's where you dance. And dance. And dance some more. 511 was delighted to have been a part of such a special event. Happy 25<sup>th</sup>! We're looking forward to more great things in the months to come.

Finally, be sure and call 511 before heading out on your summer road trip. It's the one call that can save you time *and* gas money. Just dial 5-1-1 from your cell phone or landline or visit [www.FL511.com](http://www.FL511.com) where you can sign up for customized alerts, for any day, any time, any covered roadway!

Sherri Byrd  
511 Marketing Manager "



Even a pirate realizes the need to “know before you go”, pictured here at the Isle of 8 Flags Shrimp Festival with our own Sherri Byrd.!



Michelle Warren explains 511 to visitors at the Shadco Safety Fair in Regency Square



## Operations

We have been fortunate here in the Transportation Management Center that our employee retention has remained so strong over the years. Our staff has vast amount of knowledge and continually strive to improve. The good thing about good employees is that they make the Management look good! On April 15<sup>th</sup> the Jacksonville Regional Communication Center held their Annual Appreciation Day. We joined in on the fun and recognized two of our own for their hard work!

The first District 2 Operator of the Year was earned by Kristen Sedlak. Kristen has been with the TMC since the end of 2007 and has worked almost every position we have. She started off as the 511 probe driver providing reports to the TMC and WOKV. She assisted on marketing events during that time and continues to do so. She moved to operations and has excelled. She is very proactive and wears a smile to work every day. The Monster Energy drinks keep her going day in and day out! Sadly, Kristen will be moving to Pittsburgh in June. She will be missed!

District 2 started to cover District 3 back in February 2008. Covering District 3 from Jacksonville poses many challenges. The main one being communication. Eduardo Capps was our first District 3 Operator of the year. Ed excels at going out and finding the information required to populate the 511 system in a timely/accurate

manner. Ed is a Sunguide Guru and brings new ideas to the table.

Thanks again to all the TMC employees. Due to everyone's efforts our program continues to grow!

All of those good operators have been busy. During the month of April there were a total of 3,618 events! That is up from 2,200 events last April! Of those events 530 had some form of lane blockage. The Road Rangers have exchanged their jackets for short sleeves and worked a total of 2,468 events. The top two activities performed by the Road Rangers were Maintenance of Traffic and flat tire assistance.

Without ITS devices outside of Jacksonville (and parts of Jacksonville) the TMC depends on FDOT and FHP personnel to give us traffic information reports. You can reach our 24/7 line at (904)301-3700 extension 122 or our work day line at (904)360-5465. You can now also leave feedback on the Next Generation 511 system about road conditions and bugs you may find in the system that is relayed to our operators in real time. Remember the story above and "Know Before You Go! Dial 511".

Ryan Crist  
TMC Lead Supervisor

## Spotlight on... Robert Heller

Meet Robert Heller, PhD, Project Manager with SwRI, responsible for our own SunGuide™ FDOT software.

**Talk about your upbringing – where were you born / raised?** I was born in Ann Arbor Michigan; spent early years in Ypsilanti before moving to Nashville TN. I was second of six children; my 5'2" sister still calls me her little brother (I am 6'3"). I graduated from public high school in Nashville before attending Southern Methodist University in Dallas, TX majoring in Computer Science and earning a Bachelor, Master and Ph.D (BS, More of Same, Pile it Higher and Deeper). There I met the woman of my dreams and was lucky when she said "yes." We have been married for almost 36 years.

**Early Career and/or brief job history:** After completing the Ph.D., I took a job at the University of Tennessee; I tell people here in Texas it's the original UT! After four years as an Assistant Professor of Computer Science, I applied for a job at Southwest Research Institute where I have been employed since 1984.

**Job description - your current role in Transportation.** My job title is "Program Director;" in which I help develop business, respond to RFPs and manage the SunGuide software development effort for FDOT.

**How long have you been at your current job?** Almost 27 years. It seems hard to believe at times that it has been that long given the number and variety of interesting projects on which I have been privileged to work.

**Do you have any funny stories relating to your career? Such as a foot-in-mouth moment or a bad day at the office story?** When I can go more than a day without putting my foot in my mouth it will be remarkable.

**What's the best advice anyone's ever given you?** My father told me more than once: "You ain't learning nothing when you're talking,"

**Do you have a favorite quote? Something that inspires you?** "It is better to be thought a fool than to open your mouth and remove all doubt." I have opened my mouth far more often than I should have.

**Describe a 'defining moment' in your career or personal life.** Several years ago, I was talking to a new employee at SwRI about corporate culture. Another colleague walked by and said, "Easy Heller, by now you *are* part of corporate culture."

**Best job ever / worst job ever... or both?** The best job I have ever had was whatever job I had at the time I was asked. My current job is no

### Spotlight on... Robert Heller continued

exception. SwRI is a wonderful place at which to work – I have had the opportunity to make my own career; to cap it off, Steve Dellenback is a great supervisor.

**Tell us a little about your family.** My wife Nancy and I have two sons; Andrew who is 25 and lives in Austin, TX and Ridley who is 27 and lives in Dallas. Ridley is engaged to be married this summer to a wonderful young lady.

**Do you have any hobbies?** The leisure time activities that seem consistent through the years seem to be reading, fly fishing, making pots and Boy Scouts. I have recently undertaken a hobby project to convert all the photographs I have taken (for which I can find negatives) to digital images (yes, I still use a film camera).

**Favorite vacation spot?** Anywhere with my wife. We have taken some special trips together including a cruise up the Hudson River and wonderful trip to Chicago (how many museums can you visit in a long weekend?).

**Anything else you'd like to add...** This has gone on way too long.



Dr. Heller and his lovely wife, Nancy, withOUT his signature bow tie!

**Editor's note:** One of the first times I met Robert Heller, I addressed him as "Dr. Heller". He immediately told me Robert was fine. I explained to him that my rule is that people who have achieved so much educationally should be addressed as such. I then added that I could call him Dr. Heller, or I could call him "P Bobby" (as in PhD Bobby). He quickly acquiesced to my Dr. Heller.

## Photo Gallery



The Byrd's happened upon this vehicle while lost in the rainforest of St. Croix. We're glad their adventure ended better than these folks.



The Byrd family, Husband/Dad Tim, Wife/Mom Sherri, and beautiful daughters Elise and Cierra in St. Thomas, USVI.



The Byrd family in Mexico, during a "less stressful part of the trip"

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