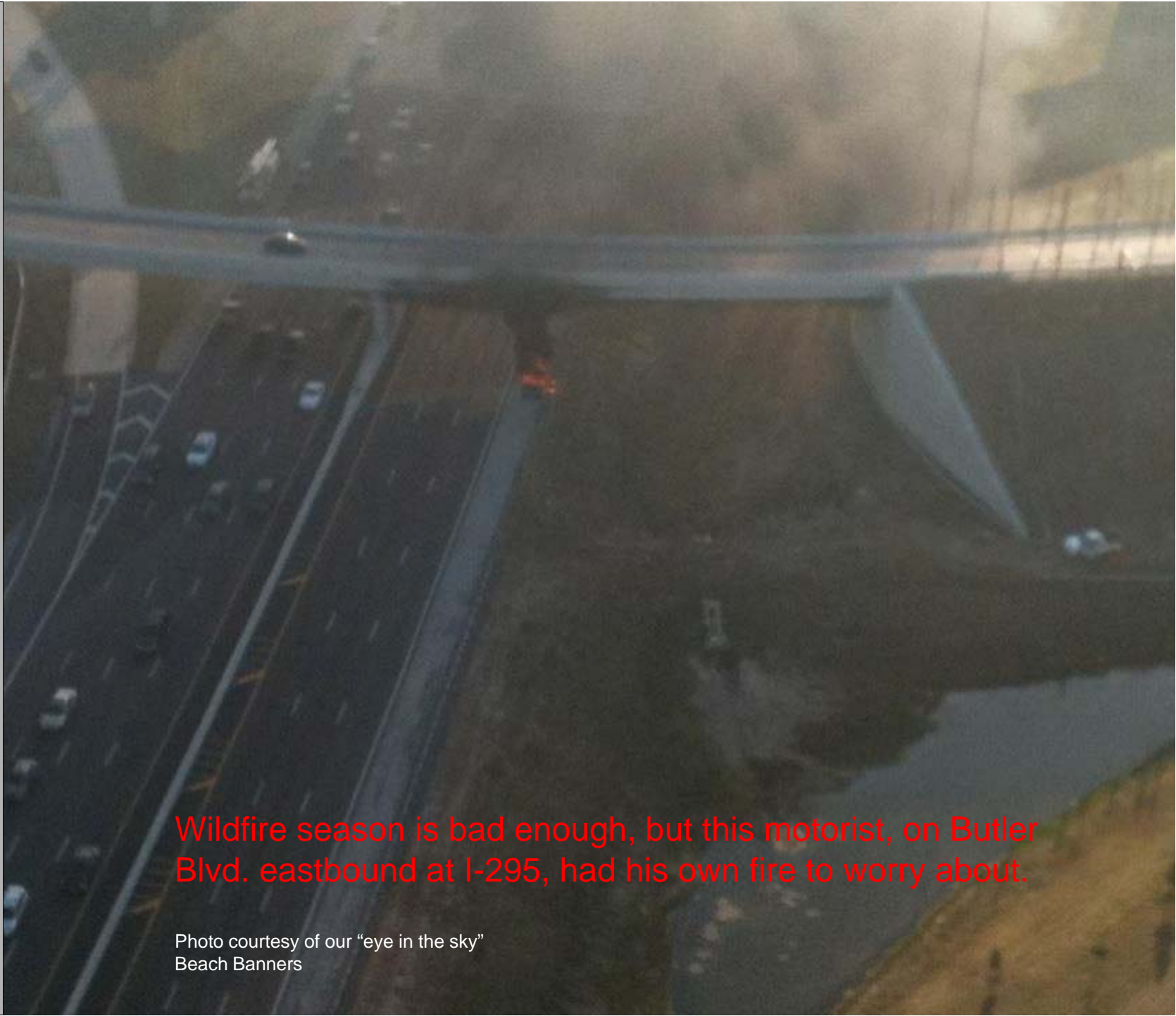


FDOT DISTRICT TWO

Intelligent Transportation Systems Newsletter –
April 2012
Issue 54

An aerial photograph of a multi-lane highway, likely I-295, showing a fire on the shoulder. The fire is a bright orange-red spot on the right side of the road. The surrounding area is hazy, suggesting a wildfire season. The highway has multiple lanes with white and yellow markings. There are some vehicles visible on the road.

Wildfire season is bad enough, but this motorist, on Butler Blvd. eastbound at I-295, had his own fire to worry about.

Photo courtesy of our “eye in the sky”
Beach Banners

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ITS Announcements

First Coast TIM Meeting	District 2 Urban Training Facility	05/15/2012 10am
FHWA Advanced TIM Workshop for Mid-level Managers	District 2 Urban Training Facility	05/15-05/16/2012

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 month of April has certainly been one for the ages! First and foremost was receiving notification that the TMC received a Davis Productivity Award for the Smart Phone Application for Road Rangers (SPARR). It was a surprise to everyone on our team since it was such a simple and enjoyable project to execute. My next goal is to go National to see how well we do against others in the ITS arena. A few minor tweaks and “watch out ITS America!” Our second surprise was seeing just how windy it is on the high profile bridges. This past weekend opened my eyes to what actually is encountered by motorists at various locations throughout the City of Jacksonville.

When checking the NOAA site I quickly learned that 30 MPH wind gusts are commonplace at the top of the Dames Point Bridge on State Road 9A (I-295 East Beltway for the modernists). Some measurements showed that there were steady gusts in the 42 MPH range for an extended period on this bridge. Not something you’d expect on a normal weather day. The weekend of April 21st we had a cold front pass through that brought strong wind conditions to the Jacksonville area. It was amazing to see that the I-95/I-10 interchange displayed steady gust readings of 35 MPH. I never would have thought this could happen in the downtown area until I saw it with my very own eyes.

April was also the month when we began the selection of a new TMC operations contractor. The

incumbent, Total Traffic, did not submit a bid thus the field became wide open for interested firms. The ITS office is utilizing the Invitation to Negotiate process to make the selection. I felt this would be the most effective method to choose a vendor since project specific information could be gained via the interview process. The three firms competing for the job are Metric Engineering, Telvent and URS. Each firm on its own merits could do the job however we are looking for the “best of the best” which could take us to another level in TMC and 511 operations.

Going through this process took me down memory lane since the current contractor Project Manager, Penny, and many of her staff has been with us since the beginning of the District Two TMC operations. I still recall one of our first operators, Lynn, starting her first day at 7 AM. She was still in the beginning phases of training so we sat her down at the workstation and began to orient her on the system. I do not recall the specifics but the TMC supervisor and I got distracted into another conversation. Lynn politely interrupted and said “so if I see a burning truck on the side of the road that’s something that needs me to take action?” As we turned around to answer her question she pointed at the monitor to show us a burning truck on the side of I-10. Five minutes into the job and she was already initiated to the excitement in the TMC!

District Two ITS was always fearless on being the guinea pig for Central Office testing so we

Notes from the District 2 ITS Engineer cont.

volunteered to be the first TMC to install the SunGuide software package. It wasn't perfect at first but it was much better than what we had in place for our system so we said "what the hell, let's give it a try!" Ironically, Lynn was again our victim and it was quite interesting to hear her comments when we inquired about the performance of the software. Don't get me wrong, this was good to have an honest critique because we could only make it better and Lynn's maturity level helped in providing an honest assessment of its performance.

The Southwest Research Institute (SWRi) staff was very excited about this first SunGuide deployment so they decided to fly to Jacksonville from San Antonio to get their first peak at the system. The day of their arrival the operator on duty was.....Lynn (go figure!). Well, by then we realized we had to keep an eye on Lynn because she could be mischievous at times. She did not know SWRi personnel were coming to the TMC however she had enough of being the guinea pig so she left us a nice note to share her feelings that very day. As Dr. Heller walked through the door he was greeted by an 8.5" X 11" note in black magic marker left on the front door of the TMC Supervisor. What did the note say? "SUNGUIDE SUCKS!!!"

Dr. Heller freaked out, begged for our forgiveness and made it his top priority to improve on the performance of the SunGuide software. We

decided to let him spend a few hours with Lynn so that she could provide "real world" TMC operator experiences with the software. Within a few weeks SWRi sent a package to fix the bugs and made recommendations on the minimum requirements for our equipment. Once we completed the upgrades the SunGuide software worked to perfection and the rest is history! Our thanks to Lynn! We still miss you!!

The next magical moment at the TMC was an operator named Stephanie. She was a very intelligent girl who picked up on things very quickly but she often got caught up in the moment when things got hot and heavy along the roadways. There were countless times when major incidents on roadways would draw Stephanie from behind the workstation and to the video wall so that she could get a better look. It became common for me to come out of my office and say "ahem, Steph, don't you think it would be a good time to put messages on the signs headed that way?" Let's just say that her career as a TMC operator was very short-lived.

To me, the most interesting incident that the TMC was involved with dealt with an injured eagle that landed on I-95 northbound during the work week. How do you alert motorists about that!?! I don't think it's in anyone's Standard Operating Procedure, thus we had to adlib along the way. What made me very proud was how the staff, from the TMC Supervisor on down broke into action to

Notes from the District 2 ITS Engineer cont.

do their jobs. They treated this like a normal event even though we all knew this may have been a once in a lifetime experience at this job.



Eagle, from March 2011,
with first responders notified by the District 2 TMC

So, we are at the point where it's time for a change and I am keeping my fingers crossed that it all turns out for the best. Many people may not realize this but the TMC Operations contractor was responsible for much more than Jacksonville. They were held accountable for all traffic information on 511 for the entire District Two area. That's eighteen counties in all. Likewise, Central Office and District Three had enough confidence in them that the 511 coverage

area from Leon County west was given to our contractor for 24/7 monitoring. That's a heck of a lot of territory to cover from over 250 miles away!

Likewise, many do not know that we handle 511 feedback messaging 24/7 for the Statewide system. A motorist that leaves a feedback message will have it reviewed by our TMC operator. This operator then insures that the information is passed along to the proper District TMC. Once the task is completed we have our TMC operator call the motorist back to thank them for the information and to let them know the status of the situation. Amazingly, even the maddest of motorists are very thankful that we took the time to address their concerns and I think this draws in another loyal customer in the future.

Guess I could get long winded on the seven years with this contractor, however I will end it by saying I truly believe they were the best performers in the State during their tenure. We stayed small but did it big and I can only hope that the next firm is capable of filling their shoes.

Pete Vega
District 2 ITS Engineer

North Florida TPO Update

There was a slight lull during April for the TPO projects. The State Road 200 project is complete and the CCTV cameras in the Fernandina area are operational. The College Drive project is progressing but the challenge has just begun in an area where underground utilities are inches apart and the probability for all heck to break loose could happen at a moment's notice. The Arterial Dynamic Message sign project had a bid opening on April 25th. This is a very unique project that I am sure had contractors scratching their heads. First unique feature for this project was that we will be deploying full color arterial dynamic message signs. It's a first for the area and this unknown will scare off many.

The second unique aspect is that all communication will be handled wirelessly to our fiber backbone from the sign. When the use of wireless is involved in a project it often makes the contractors shake in their boots. This project will be the turning point for the Jacksonville program because we will now be able to dynamically detour traffic between US 1 and I-95 on the south end of town. If this proof of concept works then we can extend it to other portions of the Interstate, thus giving us the capability to try roadway "load balancing" during congested periods of the day.

The Wind Sensor deployment should be completed the first or second week of May. The vendor, Microcom Design, is currently working on the software package that will be accessible by our partners via the internet. This software is expected

to be delivered sometime during the end of June. As for the BlueToad devices the vendor is swapping out 70 units to the upgraded version. These should arrive the first week of May and will be deployed immediately thereafter.

I guess the most exciting thing to share with you regarding the North Florida TPO is the visit they had earlier this month by FHWA. I was fortunate enough to be part of FHWA Quadrennial federal certification process and had the opportunity to share information on some of the projects we had or will execute for the NFTPO. It was amazing to see the feds eyes light up when I talked about BlueToad and all the data it would provide. The same held true when we spoke about the wind sensors, the Jaxport communication project and the Airport connectivity project. Measurements are the key component in the future to assess the performance of the MPOs and DOTs around the country so I think they left Jacksonville with a very good impression of our team's efforts.

This is the one unique factor we have in North Florida. Every partner is willing to bend over backward to assist when called upon. Whether it's Clay County, Jacksonville or Nassau County we all approach the management of traffic as a team and realize that it's the symbiotic relationship between all agencies that will make it work. We are often asked by other agencies around the State, "how do you make it work?" I can honestly say that "I don't know" but guess that the work ethic, honesty and collaborative approach is just something that is common to our area.

Maintenance

Traffic Control Devices (TCD), District Two ITS Maintenance Contractor, has completed the replacement of the CCTV cameras, encoders, field switches, and Microwave Vehicle Detectors along the corridor between the I-10/I-95 Interchange and the southern I-295/I-95 Interchange. This completes the replacement of legacy devices that were installed on the first two full ITS Deployments. The old devices were deployed more than 7 years ago. Over the past few years the ITS Maintenance Group has seen these devices become less and less dependable and has had to spend more and more money to maintain them. With the new devices in place we are seeing fewer failures already, which means a more dependable system for more reliable traffic information and also lower expenditures for the maintenance contract.

TCD personnel deployed six more bridge wind sensors this month. Wind sensors were installed on the Dames Point Bridge, Fuller Warren Bridge, Hart Bridge, Flyover at I-95/I-10 Interchange, and at the Flyovers at I-95/I-295 Interchange at both the north and south ends of Jacksonville. There are two more installations planned in May on the Bridge of Lions and CR 210 bridges in St. Johns County. With all of the sensors deployed prior to Hurricane Season, TMC Operations, Police, and Emergency Operations personnel will have the ability to monitor wind speeds on bridges and flyovers from SR 206 in St. Johns County going north to the SR 200 bridge in Nassau County. The

manufacturer has been given a purchase order for the software that was discussed in last month's Newsletter and delivery of the software is anticipated in May. This software will replace a currently "user un-friendly" method of obtaining the data from the wind sensors. The software will enable FDOT and other agency's personnel to view the data and immediately know the wind conditions at all of these locations.

As discussed in last month's Newsletter, we have temporarily suspended the deployment of the BlueTOAD travel time devices. The Manufacturer has agreed to replace the devices which have not been installed, with their new Power Over Ethernet (POE) units, which are better and have fewer parts, meaning less maintenance. This month all of the uninstalled units were packaged and sent back to the Manufacturer. We expect to receive the new POE units in May. Once the new units are received, TCD will continue their work to install the devices along the roadways throughout Jacksonville.



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Maintenance continued

The TMC Consultant, Metric Engineering, had their sub-consultant, Lightning Control Consultants, provide a training course in lightning protection, grounding, bonding and surge suppression this month. The course was given at the FDOT District 2 Urban Office in Jacksonville on April 17th and 18th. The course provided classroom training to provide an overview of theory, standards and common misconceptions in the industry.



The course also provided field training, which reinforced the classroom topics and also proved valuable in analyzing several sites that had seen lightning and/or surge problems in the past.



Members of the Traffic Divisions from Nassau County, Duval County, St. Johns County and Clay County were in attendance as well as FDOT and Consultant personnel.

TCD and Metric staff have been working with new wireless devices for upcoming installation to replace existing wireless sites that are not communicating satisfactorily and also to install new devices and make connections to other agencies networks, which are not currently connected by fiber optic cable. The new wireless devices appear to be working above expectations and are very inexpensive. These devices will continue to be tested to ensure reliability and will be installed in the field in the near future.

Finally, TCD and Metric staff installed two LCD TVs on the wall at the Town of Orange Park Police Department Dispatch Center. The installation included installing a video splitter and running new cables from the existing PC under the floor and up the wall to where the new TVs were placed. The new TVs allow Dispatch personnel to view the CCTV images and software on a much larger scale than they were previously able to do on their monitors at their workstations and allows for multiple people to view the images simultaneously.

Kevin Jackson
ITS Field Specialist

Construction

There has been very little change in status for the Phase 7 Project, on SR 9A from the northern SR 9A/I-95 Interchange going south to Atlantic Boulevard. The surety company has scheduled an internal pre-bid meeting to begin working toward a takeover agreement and hopefully having crews working on the project by the end of May.

The Phase 8 Project, on I-295 from I-95 South to I-10, is continuing to make progress on items throughout the project corridor. Crews recently completed the installation of the bridge mount conduit and are continuing to install pull boxes and power services, as well as directional bore conduit. The Contractor is still unable to purchase spun concrete poles, as there is still no QPL approved vendor. All cut sheet submittals have been processed with the exception of the hub cabinet and the Roadside Weather Sensors. These submittals are expected within the next few weeks.

The Phase 9 Project, on SR 9A from Atlantic Blvd going south to the southern SR 9A/I-95 Interchange, is nearing completion of the design phase. The plans have been submitted for FDOT review following changes to the plans to incorporate changes in the new FDOT Specifications. This project is expected to be let in September 2012.

The Phillips Highway (US 1) Project, on US-1 from Greenland Road going north to Wishart Road, continues to progress. Crews have been installing

pull boxes and tying in conduits. The Arterial Dynamic Message Signs and structures are expected to be delivered within the next two weeks. Acceptance Testing is expected to begin in July with Project Acceptance anticipated after the required burn-in period.

The SR 200 Project, which included the installation of CCTVs along SR 200 to the East of the Intracoastal Waterway, was completed within allowable contract time. These new CCTV installations provide Nassau County with live video of their most congested travel route and will allow Nassau County Traffic personnel to monitor traffic and dynamically change signal timings to ease congestion.

The College Drive Project includes the installation of fiber optic cable along College Drive, a small section of CR 220 and Sleepy Hollow Road to provide a communications link from the Clay County Traffic Operations Center to Blanding Boulevard. The contractor has been installing underground conduit and pull boxes along the corridor throughout the month. This project is currently on schedule.

John Kell
District 2 ITS Construction Project Manager

Operations

There are few things in this world that can stand up to Family and our Country when dealing with pride and love. I love my job and believe in the mission statement that Pete Vega has set forth for the District 2 Transportation Management Center. Two Supervisors on our staff have made me proud with their recent time off from the D2 TMC protecting the Country we love and the other, expanding their family.

Santos Morin has been a Supervisor here in Jacksonville for over 2 years working between District 3 Bi-Lingual Operations and District 2 Traffic Ops. Santos' dedication doesn't stop at the TMC as he is also in the Navy Reserves. Not only has Santos worked his way up the TMC food chain he also is working on a promotion with the Navy. Santos is currently on his three week Military leave to unknown secret locations, serving and protecting our Country. Jacksonville has a lot of pride in their two Naval Stations: NAS Jacksonville and NS Mayport. Santos is a cog of those forces that protect our freedoms. To steal a Navy axiom: Santos Morin- A Global Force for Good. Thank you for your service Santos.

On March 1st District 2 Assistant Supervisor Rebecca Bratcher gave birth to Sofia Lorraine Bratcher. Rebecca worked up to the last week of February making sure everything was set up and covered in her absence. She came to Jacksonville via the Virginia Beach TMC back in December of

2009 and now oversees the District 3 coverage Jacksonville provides for Central Office. Rebecca and her husband Mickey finally got a girl to add to their two boys! Rebecca is a wonderful mother who is proud of her family and I have had the chance to see Sofia three times already. Rebecca was kind enough to bring Sofia to meet her "extended family" at the Jacksonville Regional Communications Center's luncheon for National Public Safety Telecommunicators Week.



By the time Pete sends out this month's Newsletter Rebecca will be back in the office ready to tackle a mound of emails and duties! Congratulations, Bratcher family! *(Editor's note: Ryan has not held Sofia yet, he has a "ten pound rule" for all children, except of course, his twins)*

The month of March was a busy one for the TMC. A Traffic Signal Operator was placed in Clay County, the City of Jacksonville and the City of Gainesville (remotely from Jacksonville) as Pete stated last month. Things really have taken off as the comfort

Operations continued

level with the signal software has grown. On the TMC side of things Operations remained busy as Spring Break travelers did not mix well with the rain. Over 3,600 events were worked in March of which, over 300 had at least one travel lane blocked. The Road Rangers assisted on an astounding 2,108 events. With the weather warming those Rangers have a tough task ahead fighting Mother Nature.

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)359-6842 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
Lead TMC Supervisor

RISC – RAPID INCIDENT SCENE CLEARANCE – UPDATE

Since February 15th we have not had any additional RISC incidents but our Contractors stand ready to activate.

Traffic Incident Management (TIM) Update

ALACHUA TIM TEAM UPDATE

The Alachua Traffic Management Team met on April 11th at the FDOT Operations Office, 5301 NE 39th Avenue, Gainesville, FL. Following updates from all agencies attending, incidents occurring in the last two months were debriefed. Training presentations on proper guidelines for hazmat fuel spills were given by Gracie Kennedy with Florida Department of Environmental Services and Chris Gilbert with Alachua County Environmental Protection Department. Wallet sized cards providing guideline information for hazardous material spills were provided to all members.



Alachua TIM Meeting

Traffic Incident Management (TIM) Update cont.

FIRST COAST TIM TEAM UPDATE

The First Coast Traffic Incident Management Team will conduct their next meeting in conjunction with a 2-day training provided by FHWA for ***Advanced Traffic Incident Management Workshop for Mid-level Managers*** on May 15 – 16, 2012. This training will be held from 8:30 AM – 4:00 PM on Tuesday, May 15th and from 8:30 AM – 11:00 AM on Wednesday, May 16th. The location for this training will be the FDOT Urban Office Training Facility at 2198 Edison Avenue, Jacksonville, FL., 32204. Anyone wishing to attend this training should R.S.V.P. to donna.danson@dot.state.fl.us

FIRST COAST
FDOT URBAN OFFICE TRAINING CENTER
2198 EDISON AVENUE- JACKSONVILLE
904-360-5400

MAY 15, 2012	JULY 17, 2012
SEPTEMBER 18, 2012	NOVEMBER 13, 2012

ALACHUA
FDOT GAINESVILLE OPERATIONS OFFICE
5301 N.E. 39TH AVE- GAINESVILLE
352-381-4300

JUNE 13, 2012	AUGUST 8, 2012
OCTOBER 10, 2012	DECEMBER 12, 2012

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.

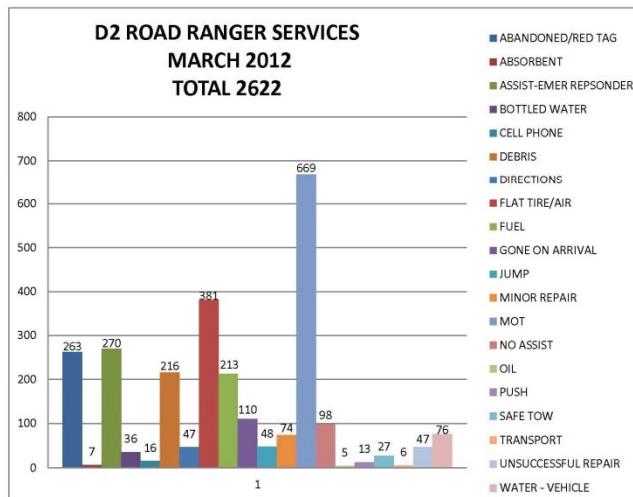


Donna Danson
 District 2 ITS Operations Project Manager

Road Ranger Update

The Road Ranger Service Patrol Operators assisted motorists with 2622 services in the month of March, 2012. The Road Ranger Operators take their job seriously and realize their importance as part of the incident management program. Comment cards and letters sent to FDOT prove the services provided by our Road Ranger Program continue to be appreciated by motorists and other incident responders and are performed in a professional manner.

Contractors Marshall Adkison and Greg Gaylord realize our Road Rangers represent tax dollars used by the Department of Transportation and take measures to insure the public and incident responders receive proper response to each incident.



Marketing

I'll be the first to admit. We've attended Bishop Kenny's Health Fair in the past, but I've never given much thought to the fact that the students we speak to every spring are the same students who will be passing me on the Fuller Warren Bridge as they learn to navigate their parents' two ton vehicle across a massive span of steel and concrete, all while merging, yielding and changing lanes. And as they do this, other "veteran" drivers will speed around them and cut them off, angry that they're only going 54 mph in a zone marked 55. The nerve! Again, I've never given this much thought... until now. You see, last Friday, my older daughter reached the magical age of 15. And as we speak, she is furiously studying for her driver's exam. Once she gets that Learner's Permit in her hands, I'll be joining the millions of parents before me who have watched their kid graduate from battery-operated Barbie jeep to family sedan. Doing wheelies in the driveway was oh so cool. Not so much in Mom's minivan. And like those aforementioned parents, I too, will leave imprints in the passenger side dashboard as my kid drives across the Fuller Warren Bridge for the first time. In the meantime, I think my husband and I will invest in some of those tacky "Student Driver" signs. And believe me when I say, this year, talking to 900 future drivers at Bishop Kenny High School meant more to me than it ever has before.

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Marketing continued

After saying goodbye to our friends at Bishop Kenny High School, we moved on to the I-95 Florida Welcome Center where we spoke to “veteran” drivers. In just two hours we spoke to almost two hundred motorists as they made their way across the state line, some even claiming to have escaped a light snowfall before leaving parts of New Jersey and upper state New York to make the trek to Florida. Needless to say, they were very glad to be greeted by sunshine, warmer temps and 511 goodies.

This past month, we also partnered with two other friends... the Teacher Supply Depot and the Jacksonville Equestrian Center. We donated a box of old Jax511 folders to the Teacher Supply Depot, and they in turn, distributed them to deserving teachers and students in the Duval County school system. If you have any outdated items you'd like to donate, please call (904) 381-7480. They're always looking for office supplies as well as gently used office furniture. (basically anything you're not using and can stand to part with) And finally, the Jacksonville Equestrian Center is pleased to announce that they're hosting their First Annual American Quarter Horse Region 10 Horse Show! This is apparently a pretty big deal in the horse world, and they were kind enough to let us place our 511 information in goodie bags they'll be distributing to participants at the event. What a fantastic opportunity! And congratulations again to our friends at the Equestrian Center. This has been a long time in the making.

Join us May 5th and 6th at the Isle of Eight Flags Shrimp Festival in Fernandina Beach Saturday, May 5th and Sunday, May 6th. And as always, we welcome your comments, thoughts and suggestions. Remember, know before you go! Log onto www.FL511.com or dial 5-1-1 before heading out the door. Also, our free 511 Traffic App is now available for download to Apple products... iPhone, iPad and iPod. Simply go to the iTunes store and search “Florida 511.” And Keep Moving!

Sherri Byrd
511 Marketing Manager



WWW.FL511.COM

Performance Measures

Incident clearance duration was high during the last couple weeks of February and the beginning of March. During these weeks there were a few events with an Open Roads duration of over 3 hours. Since then, the average incident clearance duration has come down to 80 minutes or less. Fortunately though, the Roadway Clearance duration remained at an average of 50 minutes. Clearing the road quickly is vital since this impacts traffic patterns, slows down the speed of the corridor and increases the threat of secondary crashes. The Incident Duration Summary chart below illustrates the data described herein.

There were a significantly higher number of crashes during the weeks ending March 3 and March 31. This may be due to the fact that there was approximately 0.5 inch of rain both weeks, while most of the other weeks shown in the chart reported no rainfall. Interestingly though, there was more rain the week ending March 24 but the number of crashes was about average with the weeks that had no rainfall. However, March 19 to March 23 was spring break for Duval County so this decrease in traffic likely reduced the number of vehicles that fell victim to the danger posed by wet roads. Event data is shown in the following chart.

The monthly audit of event data continues. In the audits, events with unusually long open

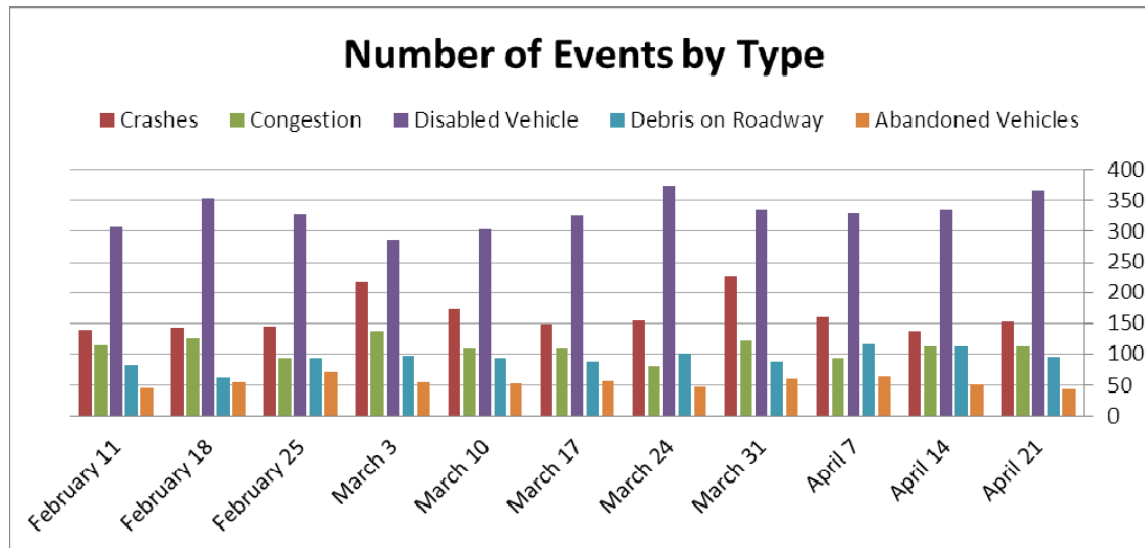
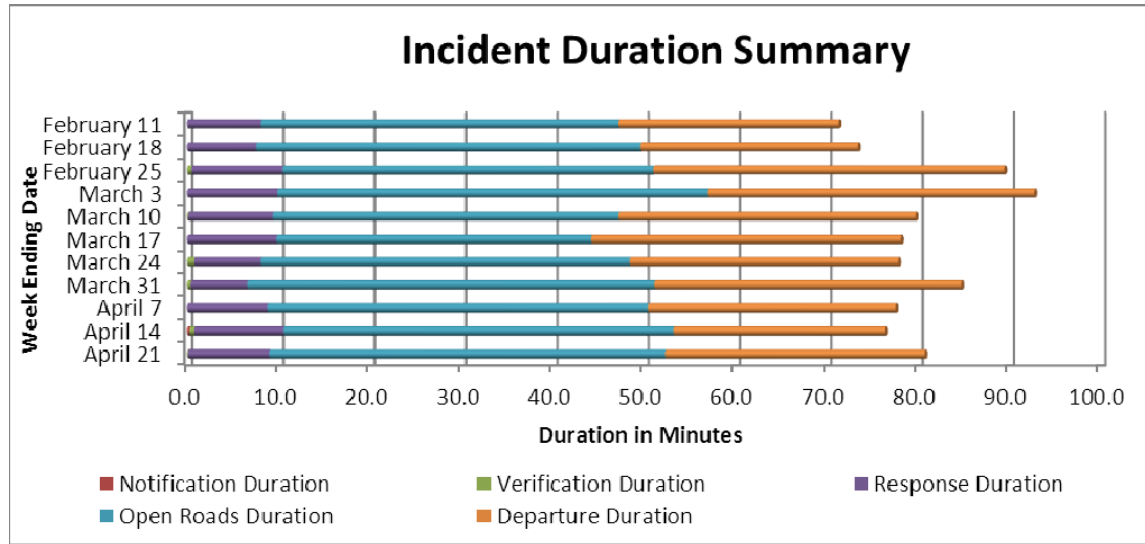
roads duration times are highlighted and investigated as well as other discrepant data. This is a valuable task since it results in correction of data entry errors, but also because it identifies where improvements could be made in traffic incident management. The latter benefits the Traffic Incident Management team and is presented as a topic at the First Coast Traffic Incident Management bimonthly meetings. Due to these audits, the performance measures reports contain more reliable data that accurately reflects the performance of the Traffic Management Center and responders to events recorded in SunGuide.

On the following page is a chart that provides a summary of incident durations. Additionally, a chart that provides an overview of the types of events.

Jill Dawson
Metric Engineering

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Performance Measures continued



A DAY IN THE LIFE...Katie Langella TMC Operator

February this year I got to experience humanity at the most insane that I have seen it so far! My Aunt, Marci, invited me and a friend to take a trip with her to New Orleans for the Mardi Gras celebration. Little did we know the madness that was in store for us “newbies”.

We departed after I got off work on Friday night around 8pm in Marci's van full of craft supplies and costumes and all of our necessities. Although I was exhausted, I stayed awake with Marci in the front while my friend Victoria napped in the back. I had never strayed from the east coast so I wanted to see everything along the way. We decided that every 2 hours we would switch drivers so everyone could get some rest. I-10 all the way, past Tallahassee, Pensacola, through the Bankhead Tunnel in Mobile, and across Lake Pontchartrain into New Orleans.

We had made it! Stretching our legs, we walked over to Cafe du Monde around 5 am just in time for the typical crowd to be finishing off their last drinks for the night and preparing to walk off their hangovers on the cold wet streets of the French Quarter. We sat down and ordered chicory coffee and beignets, which reminded me of funnel cakes as they were basically made with dough and powdered sugar. After breakfast we wandered over to Jackson Square to watch the sun rise over the Mississippi river. We then got back in the van to

head to Marci's friend Tree's apartment where we were to be crashing over the weekend.

After napping for several hours, we got dressed up to get a tour from Marci of the French Quarter in daylight and Bourbon Street prior to the wild parties that would happen over the next few days. In the evening we went to check out Tree's band The Blue Trees at Checkpoint Charlies. Marci was stoked because she had been invited to play with the band, and Victoria and I sipped a few beverages as we watched them play. In our excitement over being in New Orleans, we didn't realize just how many drinks we had had, and proceeded to do silly things such as climb on top of the cabinets to sit and watch the band, lose Marci's car keys (they turned out to have fallen behind the bar) and get lost ourselves (we were really only around the corner but completely unfamiliar with the area). Enough stupidity for one night, we located ourselves and went back to Tree's to pass out until the morning.

Sunday morning, I realized just how many drinks we had had because I had spent over half of the money I had brought for the entire trip. We decided to take it down a notch until Tuesday, and we spent most of the day helping Marci set up costumes for Tree and his room mates. In the afternoon, Tree left to perform on a float in one of the many parades all over town, and we met at a designated location on

A DAY IN THE LIFE... continued Katie Langella, TMC Operator

Frenchman Street so that he could toss us some good "throws". We collected over 20 pounds of beads, as well as glasses, spears, cups and other less appropriate items. At one point we looked over in time to see a big bag of beads being thrown and they smacked this poor unsuspecting drunk guy right in the face and completely floored him. Yeah, you've got to look out for what rains down from the floats or you could get knocked out or poked in the eye.

Monday was another day of catching beads and such from different floats in parades all over the French Quarter. We found out that Will Ferrell was King Bacchus in one of the Krewes and would be throwing goodies from a float so we got super excited and ran to the street where his float would be passing by just in time to see him. I was able to get a bad quality video on my phone of him and in doing so I missed being able to catch any of his throws. I did hear that they made tons of miniature cowbells specially for him to give out.



That evening we took it easy to prepare for the biggest day of the Mardi Gras celebration.

Tuesday, the big day! We got up early, dressed up, packed a backpack full of mixed drinks, and headed out on foot to the parades. We met up with friends and had a dance party in the middle of an intersection as people arrived to create a huge crowd which would then dance/march all the way across town. Everyone was in colorful, glittery costumes and some were on tricycles which pulled wagons full of coolers of alcohol and big boom boxes blasting jazz music. Others were carrying instruments: drums, trombones, flutes, horns, etc... We danced down busy roadways, across intersections, under bridges and highways, and through small neighborhoods. People on both sides of the road were cheering and waving. When a car honked in frustration at having to wait for the giant wave of people to pass, it was rushed by people dancing and gyrating and making faces. We passed through Bourbon Street and people on the balconies demanded for the girls to flash them...no one really complied. We danced nonstop from about 8am until 6pm, then fought over taxis for an hour before being successful. We packed to leave, because Victoria had to work the next day, fueled up on sushi before embarking on our long journey back home.

New Orleans seemed to have literally chewed us up and spit us out. What a wild and crazy experience, but also safe and so much fun. Next year I intend to go back, and have an elaborate costume when I do... because I am no longer a newbie!

PHOTO GALLERY



Bishop Kenny High School students, soon to be on the road driving, learning About “knowing before going” with 511



Enroute from the Alachua TIM Meeting we encountered a CB radio shop with this sign



On our way back from the Alachua TIM Meeting, we happened upon a garbage truck with its load on fire. Seconds later, one of Our Road Rangers was on the scene setting up the MOT.

A few short moments later, FHP and Fire Rescue arrived.

Aren't you glad you weren't the firefighter who had to climb the ladder with all that garbage smoke! A GREAT example of how important Traffic Incident Management is! Not pictured, Donna Danson, who immediately put on her safety vest and crossed busy I-10 to lend her assistance.

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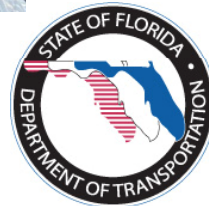
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 James Speed

Fill-In & Feedback

Operators
 Ben Brown
 Alexis Corsetti
 Jonathan Figueroa
 Joshua Mattie

D2 Night & Weekend Operators

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