

January 30, 2019

## **COMMUNITY UPDATE #1 ON SH 71 WEST**

Since its formation in late 2018, Safer71 has been working diligently to improve the safety of SH 71 West between Southwest Parkway and the Blanco County line.

Safer71 has been in numerous discussions with a wide range of government and municipal agencies, as well as concerned business owners and residents in the area.

To date, Safer71 has engaged in discussions with:

- Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT)
- Commissioner Gerald Daugherty of Precinct 3 Travis County
- Capital Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (CAMPO)
- Travis County Sheriff's Office
- Travis County Constable's Office Precinct 3
- Travis County District Attorney's Office
- Texas Department of Public Safety
- Rep. Vikki Goodwin, District 47
- City of Lakeway
- City of Bee Cave
- Representatives of HOA's in the area of SH71 West

Safer71 is greatly appreciative of the time and attention that has been provided by these agencies and their representatives to the concerns of residents and commuters along SH71 West.

This community update provides background on the conditions and history of SH 71 West, progress that Safer71 has made to date, and the engineering, enforcement, and education activities currently underway to achieve road safety along this corridor.



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## **Background**

SH 71 West is a regional arterial corridor that acts as the primary connector between Mason and Llano Counties and Austin. Along the corridor are additional major cities and ETJ areas such as Horseshoe Bay, Marble Falls, Spicewood, Bee Cave, and Lakeway.

Importantly, SH 71 West is the only route east of Marble Falls to Austin. Further, it acts as the primary local traffic route in accessing amenities for residents located west of Bee Cave along SH 71. As such, the traffic volumes on this highway are extremely high relative to the population.

As a state road, SH 71 is managed entirely by TxDOT. While the road passes through the City of Bee Cave, and is part of Travis County, all aspects of engineering enhancement and construction are ultimately managed by TxDOT.

SH 71 West was previously a four-lane undivided highway. Between 2008 and 2016, it was upgraded to include a center-turn lane from east of the Pedernales River to Oak Hill. It is currently classified as a Principal Arterial and is a 4-lane divided highway with a continuous left-turn lane.

Currently, Capital Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (CAMPO) is conducting a regional arterial study. This is a high-level study that will help determine and prioritize our region's transportation needs. The study will be completed this year. Once completed, CAMPO, TxDOT and local governments will prioritize transportation projects based on the results of the study and available funding.

SH 71 West has many elements that make it challenging to upgrade:

- Topographically, it has many undulations and sight distance issues resulting in dangerous access points and intersections;
- There are many residential and commercial driveways and access roads that would be impacted by a major upgrade;
- There are numerous environmentally sensitive areas and parks that must be accommodated, and;
- Engineering enhancements must meet pollution and aesthetic demands of residents.

Due to local traffic use of SH 71 West, signalized intersections are in place along this route. Traffic Impact Assessment (TIA) studies performed with the Bee Creek Sports Complex and Village at Spanish Oaks projects, assessed the current and future ability of these intersections to meet acceptable Levels of Service (LOS) for traffic volumes.

These TIA studies showed that several of the intersections along SH 71 West currently operate at the most minimum levels of acceptable service at peak periods. These intersections are vital to providing safe access to SH 71 West. This isn't unique to SH 71 West; most urbanized intersections fall into this category (LOS D/E). It is a measure of demand versus capacity. However, Safer71 believes that



the current intersection designs and lane capacity are insufficient for existing traffic volumes and will continue to decline as the population grows,

The areas adjacent to Travis County and Western Travis County have experienced rapid population growth since 2000. Average population growth in the areas of Bee Cave, Lakeway and Spicewood has been 174 percent, and Bee Cave has grown at an astounding rate of over 385 percent since 2000. This growth shows little signs of slowing down.

Travis County has on record numerous housing subdivisions and associated commercial tracts for development along the SH 71 West corridor. Existing developments and those approved for construction will result in 6,000 to 10,000 new households in the area by 2030.

This area has also been identified by the Lake Travis Independent School District (LTISD) as a prime location for future schools in the region. As of January 1, 2019, a new middle school is under construction, an elementary school will soon begin construction, and an additional elementary school and high school are planned near Reimers-Peacock Road. All these schools will be primarily access via SH71 West.

The area is also receiving additional county amenities that will increase traffic in the area. Primary amongst these is the Bee Creek Sports Complex which will include over 500 parking spots and is expected during weekly sports activities to add 4,000 to 6,000 vehicles per day to SH 71 West.

SH 71 West is also the primary corridor utilized by numerous quarry and rock crushing facilities. These facilities support a substantial amount of construction throughout the South and West Austin metropolitan area via SH 71 West. Trucking associated with these plants adds increased danger to the corridor as a result of increased road-wear, additional road debris, and limited acceleration/stopping capabilities at intersections and on hills.

SH 71 West has a history of serious and fatal crashes. Safety was the impetus for the previous engineering improvements to re-grade and add the center-turn lane. However, ongoing population growth, combined with topography of the road itself, drainage and surface materials used, debris from commercial traffic, speed limits, driver habits, and other elements have led to a resurgence in serious crashes and injuries along the corridor.

TxDOT measures the severity of injuries in accidents with the following criteria:

- **K** – Killed
- **A** – Suspected Serious Injury
- **B** – Non-Incapacitating Injury
- **C** – Possible Injury
- **N** – Not Injured



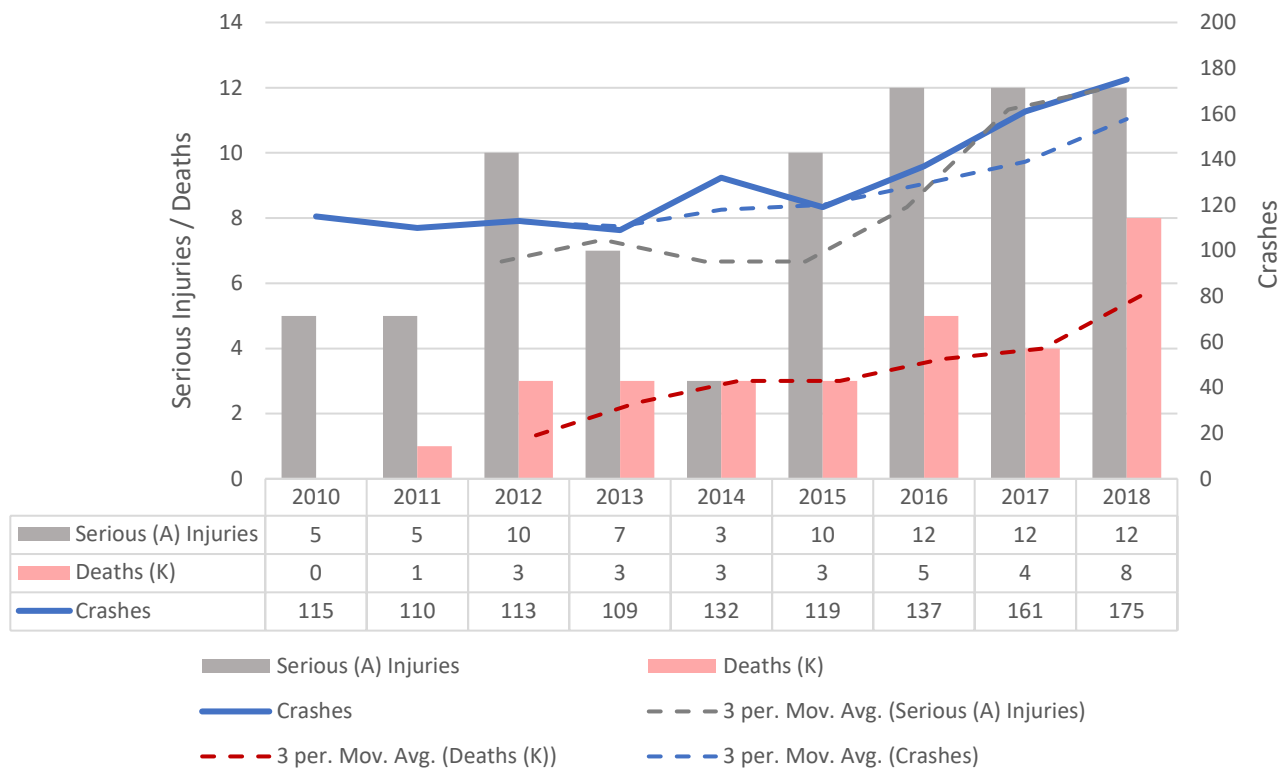
TxDOT generally looks at crash rates combining the K, A and B class of crashes (KAB). Using this approach:

- The three year average crash rate for serious KAB crashes is 11.56 on the SH 71 segment from SW Parkway to the County Line.
- The three year average KAB crash rate for State Highway is 19.8 rural and 36.8 urban.
- This section of road (0700-03) is ranked 328 out of 452 roadways for KAB crash rates in the Austin district on a three year average.

However, Safer71 feels that these crash data numbers do not accurately reflect how safety on SH71 West has changed over time, and in particular since 2014. Despite improvements being made between 2010 and 2018 to add the center turn lane to this portion of SH 71 West, the number of accidents, serious injuries and deaths along this 17.7 mile stretch of road.

### SH71 WEST SOUTHWEST CRASH & SERIOUS INJURIES

SOURCE: TXDOT CRIS, SH71 WEST: SOUTHWEST PKWY - BLANCO COUNTY LINE, 2010 - 2018



While the total number of crashes, serious injuries, and deaths has continued to rise on SH71 since 2014, it is strongly correlated to the rise in population and traffic volume in the area. The overall ratio of crashes and injuries to population is relatively constant. Given this, with no slowdown predicted in population or traffic growth in this region, Safer71 believes it is imperative that solutions to road safety be investigated now in order to reduce injuries and deaths in the future.



Travis County often partners with TxDOT to provide solutions for safety measures or contribute to projects to accelerate their implementation. The primary means by which the county supports road safety however, is through enforcement.

SH 71 West is within Precinct 3 of the Travis County Sheriff's Office (TCSO) and Travis County Constables Office (TCCO). Deputies and Constables within the precinct enforce traffic violations along the corridor and throughout the geographic boundaries of their region. In addition, TCSO maintains a commercial enforcement division which is distributed across the entire county and focus on violations from large trucks.

SH71 is also enforced by personnel from the Department of Public Safety (DPS). DPS also maintains a commercial enforcement division. DPS resources are spread across multiple counties.

The City of Bee Cave and the City of Lakeway are permitted to enforce traffic violations along SH 71 that occur within their city limits. With the recent increase in injuries along this corridor, efforts from the municipal police departments have been increased to reduce potential incidents.

### **Safer71 Objectives**

Despite the challenges that exist in expanding SH 71 West to a MAD-6 along its length to the Pedernales River, Safer71 believes that it must be upgraded to support the population and traffic levels of the region, and to ensure adequate connectivity between the regional hubs of Llano, Marble Falls and Austin.

Safer71 has identified a need for additional resources (headcount and equipment) to support enforcement activities in the region. This will assist in increasing voluntary compliance with speed limits, distracted and reckless driving, and driving while intoxicated.

Safer71 has also identified a need for educational programs to increase awareness on car and tire maintenance, responsible driving habits, newly licensed driver education, new-to-Texas driver education, and defensive driving programs.

### **Activity to Date**

Safer71 has been working diligently to advocate on behalf of residents in the area. The below is a history of their activities to date:

- October 28, 2018: Dr. Michael Babineaux killed in fatal crash on SH 71, spurring the formation of Safer71.
- November 7, 2018: Initial meeting of Safer71 volunteers, resolution to form non-profit and establish a charter to improve road safety in Travis County. Greg Short appointed as President of Safer 71.
- November 13, 2018: Safer71 presents to the Travis County Commissioners Court in opposition to the proposed road enhancements associated with the Bee Creek Sports Complex.



- November 15, 2018: Safer71 meets with Lakeway Mayor and City manager to discuss mutual opportunities to improve road safety in the region.
- November 26, 2018: Safer71 meets with Bee Cave Mayor and City manager to discuss mutual opportunities to improve road safety in the region.
- November 28, 2018: Safer71 leads efforts to participate in the CAMPO public input process for their regional arterial plan and CAMPO 2045 comprehensive transportation plan.
- November 29, 2018: Safer71 meets with Commissioner Gerald Daugherty to discuss potential improvements to SH 71 West.
- December 12, 2018: Safer71 meets with CAMPO and TxDOT to learn more about the funding and selection process for road projects in Texas.
- December 12, 2018: Safer71 meets with CAMPO, TxDOT, and Commissioner Gerald Daugherty to review a list of projects identified by Safer71 for short, medium, and long-term improvements to SH 71 West.
- December 20, 2018: Bee Cave Police utilize STEP grant funds to provide additional enforcement activities on SH 71 West over the holiday period.
- December 28, 2018: Safer71 meets with Representative-Elect Vikki Goodwin of District 47 to discuss mutual opportunities to improve road safety in the region.
- December 31, 2018: Safer71 provided formal response in the Phase 2 public comment period to the CAMPO Regional Arterial Plan and CAMPO2045 plan addressing the needs of SH 71 West.
- January 4, 2019: TxDOT hosts a meeting with Safer71 and Commissioner Gerald Daugherty to respond to the items presented on December 12, 2018.
- January 9, 2019: Safer71 meets with DPS and TCSO Precinct 3, to discuss enforcement and resource availability on SH 71 West.
- January 22, 2019: Safer71 meets with Travis County District Attorney's office to review laws and due process related to prosecution of vehicular accidents resulting in manslaughter or aggravated assault causing serious bodily harm in Travis County.
- January 24, 2019: Safer 71 meets with Stacy Suits, Travis County Constable Precinct 3, to discuss enforcement and resource availability on SH 71 West.

### **Engineering Progress**

TxDOT has been working since early 2018 to address engineering solutions on SH 71 in the area between Serene Hills Dr. and Bee Creek Road.



The road was milled to improve traction as an intermediary effort to address hydroplaning and a resurfacing project slated for 2020 was brought forward to 2018 to lay a permeable asphalt surface layer that allows water to drain through the asphalt layer, thus reducing overspray and help prevent future hydroplaning.

TxDOT has recently installed temporary warning signs on upcoming signaled intersections along the identified corridor and elevated lights at Spanish Oaks Drive to address limited sight distance when headed east in response to specific concerns raised by area residents.

Below are additional items that were presented to TxDOT by Safer 71, followed by a summary of TxDOT's response.

LOCATION	TxDOT RESPONSE
<p><b>SH71 West: Serene Hills Dr. to Bee Creek Rd.</b></p>	<p><b>Investigate feasibility of substantial redesign to SH71. Project should include implementation of permanent dividers from approximately .25 miles west of Serene Hills to .25 miles east of Bee Creek.</b></p> <p>TxDOT has initiated a traffic study to evaluate signal operations along SH 71 from RM 620 to Pedernales River. The study will take approximately 6 months to complete and will evaluate the need for additional signal heads, signage, operational improvements and channelization at intersections.</p>
<p><b>SH71 West: Pedernales Summit Parkway</b></p>	<p><b>Replace existing divider poles, relocate stop stripe for eastbound traffic to provide more turning radius when heading West from Pedernales Summit onto SH 71.</b></p> <p>TxDOT replaced the existing divider poles on Jan. 7, 2019. Additional improvements/recommendations may be identified by traffic study.</p>
<p><b>SH71 West: Signaled intersections (not driveways)</b></p>	<p><b>Investigate repainting of shoulder areas as interim deceleration lanes when approaching right turns off SH 71. Consider permanent deceleration lanes as part of overall plan to improve SH 71 in the future.</b></p> <p>Traffic study will provide guidance/recommendation on this item. However, the shoulders may legally be used for right turns.</p>
<p><b>SH71 West: Non-Signaled intersections (not driveways)</b></p>	<p><b>Investigate repainting of shoulder area as interim acceleration lanes when turning right onto SH71</b></p> <p>Acceleration lanes will not be part of traffic study but will evaluate the need on future widenings associated with developments along SH 71.</p>



<p><b>SH71 West: Serene Hills Dr.</b></p>	<p><b>Implement No Right Turn on Red at Serene Hills for traffic heading West on SH71.</b></p> <p>Traffic study will evaluate this request and provide recommendation.</p>
<p><b>SH71 West: Signaled Intersections Southwest Parkway to Blanco County</b></p>	<p><b>Increase the delay on signal changes to achieve a longer delay on all reds to prevent possible collisions from red light runners.</b></p> <p>Traffic study will evaluate this request and provide recommendation.</p>
<p><b>SH71 West: Non-Signaled Intersections Pedernales Summit Pkwy Sweetwater Crossings</b></p>	<p><b>Add signs warning of entering traffic when headed east on SH71 before these roads.</b></p> <p>Traffic can enter at any time from multiple locations. These signs are not an approved solution. No changes will be made.</p>
<p><b>SH71 West: Signaled Intersections RR620 to Blanco County</b></p>	<p><b>Replace temporary work signs with permanent flashing signal ahead signs. Add flashing signals where only signs exists.</b></p> <p>Traffic study will evaluate and provide recommendation.</p>
<p><b>SH71 West: Signaled Intersections RR620 to Blanco County</b></p>	<p><b>Inspect which lights need elevated signals and provide timeline on when they can be installed.</b></p> <p>Traffic study will evaluate and provide recommendation.</p>
<p><b>SH71 West: Signaled Intersections RR620 to Blanco County</b></p>	<p><b>Inspect signaled intersections operating below acceptable LOS levels and determine engineering and/or signal timing improvements.</b></p> <p>Traffic study will evaluate and provide recommendation.</p>
<p><b>SH71 West: RR620 to Blanco County</b></p>	<p><b>Ensure that all left turns at signaled intersections permit left on green only (no yield based left turns). Replace signs as needed.</b></p> <p>All intersections within the study area have been changed to only allow protected left turns (green arrow) and remove the permissive left option.</p>



<p><b>SH71 West: Pedernales Summit Pkwy Signaled Intersection</b></p>	<p><b>Remove the flashing yellow right turn signal when entering SH71 eastbound and replace with green arrow.</b></p> <p>Traffic study will evaluate and provide recommendation.</p>
<p><b>SH71 West: Serene Hills - Bee Creek</b></p>	<p><b>Restriping with “ripple strips” as interim safety measure until paving can be completed in 2019.</b></p> <p>Restripe of the milled area has been completed.</p>
<p><b>SH71 West: Ascents &gt; 0.25 miles</b></p>	<p><b>Determine if trucks must use right lane only sign can be installed on SH71 ascents.</b></p> <p>Trucks cannot be restricted to only use outside lane</p>
<p><b>SH71 West: RR620 to Blanco County</b></p>	<p><b>Can truck speed limits of 40mph on descents be implemented at these dangerous descents?</b></p> <p>Trucks must obey speed limit established for roadway.</p>
<p><b>SH71 West: RR620 to Blanco County</b></p>	<p><b>Remove debris more frequently to improve safety</b></p> <p>TxDOT will continue to monitor and sweep/remove debris as needed. Additional focus on center turn lanes, shoulder, and truck debris has been communicated to the maintenance team.</p>
<p><b>SH71 West: RR620 to Blanco County</b></p>	<p><b>Investigate limiting left turns onto SH71 at identified intersections where visibility is limited, or danger is present.</b></p> <p>Only upon the request of a permit holder can TxDOT change this as the road exists today. Safer 71 can work with HOA's and property owners to this end if they desire. Some entrances may change as part of the studies and resulting projects identified by the TxDOT consultant.</p>
<p><b>SH71 West: RR620 to Blanco County</b></p>	<p><b>In conjunction with lowered speed limit, install Telemetry Speed Display Signs on SH71 as safety measure. ROW must be verified for installation locations.</b></p> <p>TxDOT does not have any specifications governing the installation of these signs but will work with Travis County to allow use on TxDOT's ROW.</p> <p>Travis County currently reviewing costs and capabilities associated to install and maintain these signs.</p>



<p><b>SH71 West: Pedernales River to Blanco County</b></p>	<p><b>Accelerate existing program to widen roadway west of the Pedernales bridge to add center turn lane, address grading issues and add shoulders.</b></p> <p>TxDOT has a funded project to widen SH 71 from Pedernales River to Blanco County Line to add a continuous left turn lane. Project has an estimated construction cost of \$13 million and is scheduled for March 2022 letting.</p>
<p><b>SH71 West: Serene Hills Dr. to Bee Creek Rd.</b></p>	<p><b>Investigate feasibility of substantial redesign to SH71. Project should include implementation of permanent dividers from approximately .25 miles west of Serene Hills to .25 miles east of Bee Creek.</b></p> <p>Traffic study will evaluate and provide recommendation. We are not considering a substantial redesign.</p>
<p><b>SH71 West: RR620 to Pedernales River</b></p>	<p><b>Lower Speed Limit to 55MPH.</b></p> <p>TxDOT conducted a speed study and is recommending lowering the speed limit on SH 71 from 60 to 55 mph between Pedernales River and the western limits of the City of Bee Cave.</p> <p>Requires minute order approval by Texas Transportation Commission (TTC). Anticipate minute order approval during the January 2019 commission meeting.</p>
<p><b>SH71 West: RR620 to Spicewood</b></p>	<p><b>Repave road to reduce hydroplaning.</b></p> <p>TxDOT will resume paving project as soon as temperature allows night time paving operations.</p>

The following studies are being conducted by TxDOT on SH 71 to improve safety and operation efficiency:

- Study to determine the need for installation of Advance Warning of End of Green System (AWEGS) on overhead mast arms in advance of signaled intersections on SH 71 between the limits of RM 620 and Pedernales River.
- Study to determine the need for installation of near-side or far-side approach signal heads on SH 71 between the limits of RM 620 and Pedernales River.
- Study current traffic signal layouts of (1) SH 71 and Pedernales Summit Pkwy (2) SH 71 and Bee Creek Pkwy and (3) SH 71 and Serene Hills Drive for improved operational efficiency, channelization, signing and marking.



- Study the current signal timing, including verification of all-red clearance phases on SH 71 between the limits of RM 620 and Pedernales River.

The current studies will not be examining substantial redesigns of SH71 West at this time. To achieve more comprehensive improvements (such as added lane capacity or alternate designs to major intersections), the CAMPO 2045 Plan and Regional Arterial Plan must identify SH 71 West as meriting a future enhancement project.

For this reason, Safer71 has been encouraging residents to voice their concerns and needs related to SH 71 West during the public comment period for the CAMPO Regional Arterial Plan to increase visibility to the needs of the area.

To simplify resident participation, Safer71 provided an online form during Phase 2 of Public Comment for the Regional Arterial Plan and will offer a similar form during the Phase 3 process. Comments submitted with this form are sent directly to CAMPO.

Safer71 also provided an official public comment during Phase 2 (available for viewing at [www.safer71.org](http://www.safer71.org)), which will be further refined and submitted during the final phase of public comments in early 2019.

Safer71 will be working to provide maximum awareness to the local community on all opportunities for community input, while attempting to centralize communication with government agencies for maximum impact.

Safer71 is also in discussions with TxDOT, Commissioner Gerald Daugherty, and Representative Vikki Goodwin on legislative and policy measures that may provide increased planning powers for roads and transit infrastructure to prevent future development on SH71 West without appropriate improvements to SH71 and local access being implemented simultaneously.

Safer71 is also closely monitoring the proposed extension of Vail Divide to Hamilton Pool Road. The Vail Divide extension is a Travis County and local government effort and is not under the management of TxDOT. However, if completed, this road would change the flow of traffic on SH 71 West as residents living along Hamilton Pool Road use the route as an alternate access to the highway.

Safer71 is advocating that if the Vail Divide extension is completed, it has sufficient lanes to support the growing communities along Hamilton Pool Road and increased traffic in the area as a result of the new Middle School opening in 2019.

### **Enforcement Progress**

Commissioner Gerald Daugherty and his staff have been working closely with TCSO, TCCO, and DPS to increase enforcement presence in the area since October 2018. Capt. Taylor and Constable Suits have assigned dedicated vehicles to the corridor. They have also been supported by Capt. Miller of Bee Cave Police, and DPS Commercial and Traffic personnel.

Since the increase in enforcement presence there have been zero fatality crashes along the corridor.



TCSO, TCCO, DPS, and municipal police have assured Safer71 that an elevated enforcement presence will continue as part of overall efforts to address safety along the corridor.

In addition, Safer71 is engaging in discussions with the District Attorney's office of Travis County to learn more about efforts to prosecute vehicular incidents that result in vehicular manslaughter or aggravated assault, and what can be done to increase the consequences to individuals who drive recklessly in the region.

Safer71 is currently collecting research on the current resource levels available to Travis County in general for Traffic enforcement and, if understaffing exists, will work to advocate for increased budget specific to these needs for the Travis County 2020 fiscal year.

### **Education Progress**

Safer71 has held meetings with TxDOT and enforcement personnel to gain input on historical education efforts, and to identify topics most critical from their perspective in educating residents of the area.

Safer71 is currently researching these topics for best practices around the globe and will be partnering with local business, area HOA's, city managers, and enforcement personnel to offer a variety of education programs in the future.

Safer71 is also working on a series of articles in local community newspapers, billboards and other advertising, and future PSA activities to support education initiatives in the area. Safer71 has also partnered with local social media groups to improve our reach in delivering these messages.

Funding for Safer71 education programs is expected to come from individual and business donations, and grant funds.

### **Town Hall**

In 2019, Safer71 plans to hold a town hall event attended by TxDOT, Commissioner Gerald Daugherty, Rep. Goodwin, TCSO, TCCO and DPS. The goals will be to review the progress that has been made to date, provide an open forum for additional questions to be discussed, and maintain a close connection between residents and business owners, government agencies, and Safer71.

Details on the time and place of the town hall will be communicated via media and the Safer71 mailing lists once finalized.

### **Supporting Safer71**

Achieving and maintain road safety on SH71 West is a long-term commitment. As such, Safer71 is focused on establishing itself for ongoing operational viability. It is highly likely that any major engineering improvements may take more than 10 years to be approved, funded and completed.



Safer71 is comprised of volunteers from throughout the SH 71 West region. Without the help and contributions from concerned citizens it would be impossible for us to perform the necessary research, marketing, and outreach activities necessary for achieving our goals.

As a non-profit, Safer71 raises funds through individual and commercial support packages including window stickers, bumper stickers, and yard signs to both increase local awareness and fund the operations of the organization. Individuals and businesses can make financial contributions to support the efforts of Safer71 online at <https://www.safer71.org/online-store>. All support is greatly appreciated.

### **Staying Up To Date**

We encourage all interested members of communities and businesses along SH 71 West to sign up for our newsletters at <https://www.safer71.org/updates>. Our mailing list is the most effective way to receive direct updates on the latest Safer71 initiatives and efforts. You can also follow us on social media at <http://facebook.com/asaf71> or [@asaf71](https://twitter.com/asaf71).

### **About Safer71**

Safer71 is a non-profit community advocacy organization seeking to achieve safe and effective mobility on SH71 West between Southwest Parkway and the Blanco County Line. Our multi-faceted approach combines engineering improvements, enforcement enhancements, and education initiatives. Learn more at <https://www.safer71.org>.

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