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Honea-Egypt realignment may finish by the summer

By Lucretia Cardenas

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MONTGOMERY – Residents are happy to see work has started on the realignment of Honea-Egypt Road and the relocation of its railway crossing south of FM 2854.

The road realignment and relocation of the traffic signals to the new intersection are expected to relieve traffic congestion and prevent accidents occurring as a result of the road's current curve near the railway. The project should be completed by the summer, Precinct 2 Commissioner Craig Doyal said.

"I was so pleased to see them working," said Carol McKaughan, who lives on Honea-Egypt near the railway. "It's taken awhile for them to get started, but at least they are doing it. I think it will save lives and it will save time."

The intersection is a problem, residents have said, because just before the northernmost portion of Honea-Egypt crosses the railway, it dead-ends at FM 2854. Less than 100 feet to the east, FM 2854 intersects with Springwood Drive, the entrance to the 16-home neighborhood of Oak Lawn Estates.

"It is a very good thing that they are doing," Springwood Drive resident Charles Siebert said. "It's very dangerous the way it is now. When I try to leave in the morning, you almost have to risk it to get out."

Honea-Egypt resident Charlotte Thomas hopes the project saves her fence from being run over again by vehicles driving too fast around the curve and losing control, or by impatient motorists stuck in traffic at the intersection.

"The amount of traffic through here is unbelievable," Thomas said. "When the traffic is heavy on FM 2854, it's almost impossible to turn west. I just hope it (the realignment) will be effective."

Nearly 6,000 vehicles travel Honea-Egypt Road each day, said Jeff Johnson, transportation manager with the county engineer's office.

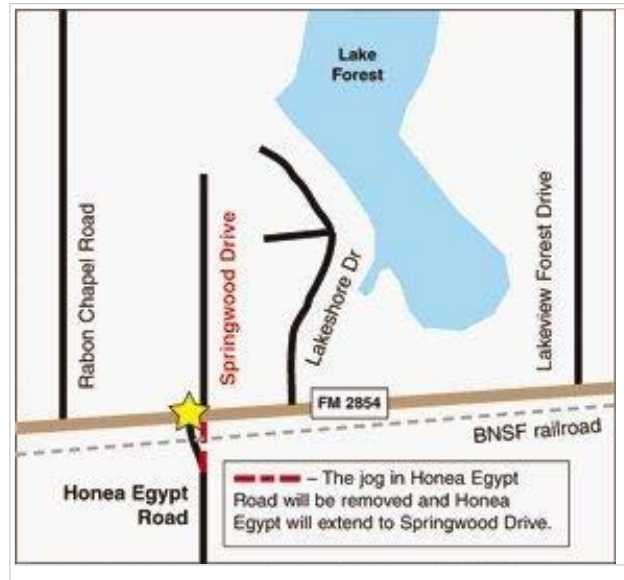
County officials were ready to lay down pavement for the new road about 18 months ago but needed cooperation from the Texas Department of Transportation and the Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railway. What began as a simple solution to a traffic issue took much longer than county officials expected, Doyal said.

"It's been long, drawn out and frustrating for us," Doyal said. "I can't imagine what it's been like for the residents driving the road every day."

In addition to working with two entities' schedules to complete the project, BNSF required county employees to complete special training and testing. The county also is required to use specified equipment when working near the railroad crossing, Doyal said.

Montgomery County commissioners approved a contract with BNSF in October to move the crossing for Honea-Egypt about 50 feet east so the county can align Honea-Egypt with Springwood Drive. The realignment allows TxDOT to place a stoplight at the new intersection on FM 2854. The county agreed to pay 80 percent, or \$242,000, of the cost.

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Last week, BNSF employees laid down the concrete slabs for the crossing. Precinct 2 work crews will begin constructing the new road the week of March 30, said Charles Riley, manager of Precinct 2 operations.

"Ideally, we'll get ours down within a week, and then we just need to wait on TxDOT to move their poles and put in the traffic signals and BNSF to put in the new crossing arms," Riley said. "But I haven't gotten a firm schedule from TxDOT or BNSF."

According to BNSF's schedule, the project is supposed to be completed in July 2009, BNSF regional spokesman Joe Faust said. TxDOT has moved the box for the traffic signals, Riley said.

Until everything is in place, the new road will be barricaded from use, Riley said. Once ready, the county will stripe the approximately 200 feet of road and open everything to the public, Johnson said. The old road will be removed.

Doyal wants to see the project completed as soon as possible because the Lake Creek Bridge is expected to open up by the end of the month or early April for the Fish Creek Thoroughfare, a north-south road that eventually will connect FM 1488 to Texas 105. Located just east of Honea-Egypt Road, the Fish Creek Thoroughfare is expected to alleviate traffic along the winding, two-lane country road, he said.

The overpass is being designed, and construction should begin later this year, Doyal said.

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