

# Redwood Highway Crashes – August 2019

U.S. 199 (Redwood Highway) is an interstate route that’s many things to many people.

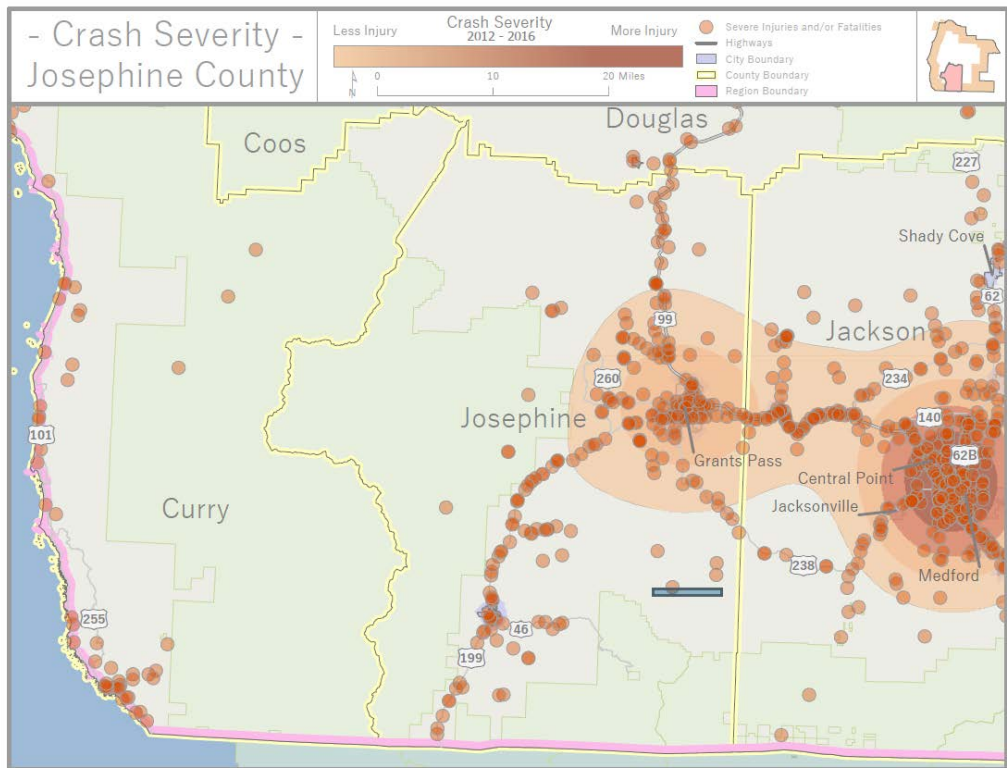
ODOT has completed a number of maintenance and safety-related projects in the corridor. However, we continue to have crashes on this high speed, rural highway. The combination of speed and distraction has deadly consequences for users. It’s also a highway without sufficient police patrols, according to law enforcement.

Here’s an overview of the issues, problems and potential solutions for Redwood Highway.

Redwood Highway is a rural arterial highway that runs from I-5 in Grants Pass to Crescent City, California. Nearly 42 miles of the 80 mile highway are in Oregon. It is a critical link; it is a primary tourist route, commuter route and acts as a main street for many residents living on and off the highway.

Traffic on the highway increases during the summer months due to the various tourist destinations, such as Oregon Caves, Redwoods and Oregon and California coastlines.

The crash rate map (right) shows the largest number of crashes occur in the Grants Pass urban area with the



crash rate in the rural area spread throughout the corridor. As predicted, crash rates in the Selma, Kerby and Cave Junction areas increase due to the number of pedestrians, cross streets and accesses. 2019 has currently recorded four fatal crashes on the highway since June 1<sup>st</sup>. Fatal crash rates, depending on the year, have been as high as eight in 2016 and as low as two in 2014. Fatal crash locations are found throughout the highway corridor. Crash victims are not from any specific age group. They are young and old.

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The top listed causes of Redwood Highway crashes from January 2009 through January 2018 are as follows:



- Driving too fast for conditions, following too close, other driver error.
- Crash type: Fixed or other object , rear end, turning movement
- Crash by light: daytime
- Surface condition/ weather: dry and clear
- Road characteristic: straight or horizontal curve
- Day of week/time of day: all days, with Monday being the worst; crashes increase through afternoon to evening
- By month: increase in May thru end of year, with July the worst
- Driver age: all ages, with 20-29 the highest age group
- Injury Severity: throughout corridor with worst between Kerby and Cave Junction

Crashes are spread out throughout the corridor with 18 SPIS (Safety Priority Index Sites) sites total.

Of those there are only two in the rural area:

- 20.09 to 20.21 – Selma/intersection
  - *Solution: install 'Stop Ahead' pavement markings and larger, additional warning and regulatory signs.*
- 29.03-29.04 –Cave Junction, south city limits
  - *Solution: place on District's schedule to install delineators and Raised Pavement Markers at intersection.*

### Past Projects

A section of the highway (MP .55-7.75) was designated as a safety corridor in 1996. In 2004, in response to a series of fatal crashes between the South Y in Grants Pass and Midway Avenue, ODOT combined several projects into one large project that constructed medians from Dowell Road to Midway Avenue. The urban section was slated for improvements but due to lack of local support from Grants Pass and Josephine County, the project was pulled. However, the U.S. 199 Fairgrounds Signal project did proceed as a safety project. The Safety Corridor was decommissioned in 2013.

In the past decade, other projects between Applegate River Bridge and Cave Junction have been completed that placed new asphalt, safety rumble strips, retroreflective striping, delineation and guard rail in the corridor.



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Next year (2020), new asphalt and ramp crossings will be constructed on U.S. 199 between the South Y and Applegate River Bridge.

### **Future Projects**

In 2020, a U.S. 199 Corridor Planning Study will begin from Grants Pass to Cave Junction. Such a plan for the long term, managed by ODOT Planning section, is required for larger improvements in the corridor such as turn lanes, added lanes, access control, interchanges and median treatments.

In addition to the larger corridor plan, ODOT is planning the following projects:

- U.S. 199 Clear Zone Project from MP 9.46 to 40.06 (border) – funded in '21—'24 STIP (State Transportation Improvement Program – basically the state's capital construction program)
  - *This project will remove roadside obstacles, add guardrail/barrier to protect, and improve the side slope of the roadway in certain areas to make the road more recoverable in the event that a vehicle runs off of the road. This project will be funded at \$435,885*
- U.S. 199 Kerby Shoulder Widening Project – funded '18-'21 STIP at \$1.019 million (ARTS – All Roads Safety - project)
  - *This project will construct a pedestrian bridge over Holton Creek in the community of Kerby.*
- U.S. 199 – Cave Junction to California border: center and edge of pavement rumble strips in next paving project (current pavement condition won't take rumble strip).

Other safety treatments can be considered but each has limitations due to the types of crashes and law enforcement funding. For instance, a Road Safety Audit has been considered but with crashes dispersed across 30+ miles, an RSA would be more beneficial for intersections or urban areas where safety issues are more difficult to diagnose.

With U.S. 199, safety issues are not concentrated and are overwhelmingly related to human factors which are difficult and expensive to influence through engineering. Those factors include speed, impaired and distracted driving and medical emergencies.

A designated Safety Corridor may be considered. However, the corridor does not currently meet the designation criteria.

The low level of law enforcement personnel has been an issue for many years, due in large part to the financial struggles of the Josephine County Sheriff's Office. Oregon State Police has filled the gap, but it also is underfunded and understaffed.

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OSP is one of several partners we have either consulted or met with regarding this corridor. For instance, ODOT met with the Illinois Valley Community Development Organization (IVCanDO) in December of 2018. The consensus arising out of that meeting is more law enforcement is needed.

Community members asked for more public outreach on safety messages in the corridor and financial help for young drivers to take driver education.



The crash problem on U.S. 199 is significant. The path forward for the Redwood Highway safety includes a multi-faceted approach that includes the 4 E's of traffic safety: engineering, enforcement, education, and EMS.

ODOT is committed to working with local and state partners – both short term and long term - to do what we can to help with the safety challenges along Redwood Highway. We are committed to a corridor planning study to reveal long term possible safety improvements. Such a comprehensive effort is not expected until mid-2020 due to scope development as well as formation of a local stakeholder committee.

ODOT is embarking on a Redwood Highway specific safety awareness campaign that will include portable and permanent message boards as well as traditional and social media and paid advertisements. A local working group is being formed to help with the process, which will include OSP.

Quick turn, ODOT District level projects, too, will be examined to increase safety. However, it is important to note, it is all a team effort. And the most important player, as the data shows, is the driving public. ##