



A New York state trooper makes a traffic stop on Route 13 just south of the City of Ithaca line.

Roads

Continued from Page 1A

outside of the City of Ithaca, and that most of the severe accidents occur on rural roads, de Aragon said.

That isn't news to local law enforcement officials, who fix the blame for accidents squarely on drivers. Yet, they concede that rural roads — including those in Tompkins County — present unique, hazardous challenges to drivers and pedestrians.

On the whole, Tompkins County's human commuters deserve high marks for increasing road safety here, according to these officials. But de Aragon summed up some of their sentiments in one simple axiom:

"Speed kills," he said.

Danger spots in Tompkins

The report, which the council created with Department of Motor Vehicle crash data, was inspired by the "Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act," or MAP-21, which President Barack Obama signed into law last July.

A handful of county municipalities have contacted the agency to look at the data further, said Tom Mank, a planning analyst for the council.

At the Journal's request, the council provided crash data, minus deer accidents, for arterial road segments, feeder road segments and intersections. Among the findings:

» Route 392 between North Road and the Village of Dryden line had the highest crash rate for arterial road segments, while Route 79 on West Hill from Sunrise Road to the city line had the most severe crashes.

» The corner of Dryden Road and Linden Avenue in Collegetown had the top crash rate of all intersections, with 73 crashes, most of them involving property damage and fender-benders. The intersection of Mt. Pleasant Road and Turkey Hill Road in the Town of Dryden saw the most severe crashes.

» Uptown Road between Cinema Drive and Warren Road in the Town of Ithaca had the highest

crash rate among feeder roads. West Groton Road, from Cobb Street to Devlen Road, had the most severe crashes for feeder roads.

The county suffered about nine fatal accidents per year from 2000 to 2010, and most of those occurred on rural roads, the council's report shows. That squares with Department of Motor Vehicle crash data for the last few years.

"In rural areas, people are moving faster, and accidents are more severe," de Aragon said.

Police advice: Slow down

State Police Capt. Troy D. Little and Zone Sgt. Edward Abruzzo agree with de Aragon. Together, the two troopers have more than 50 years of experience on the job.

"Speed is the number one killer," Little said. "That hasn't changed since I began. It's always speed."

But, some roads — like interstates that are built with broader lanes, broader shoulders and greater visibility — are more driver-friendly, Little said. Rural roads have challenges and hazards like driveways, sharp turns, intersections and pedestrian traffic, he said.

Drivers can overcome those challenges by driving for conditions, especially in terms of speed, Little stressed. Driving the speed limit or below gives drivers the edge, timewise, to react safely to ever-changing road conditions, he explained.

"Roads themselves aren't dangerous," he said. "It all comes down to driver and driver ability."

Nonetheless, they routinely gather and review accident statistics to identify intersections and road segments on which to concentrate their traffic enforcement efforts, Little said. They target high crash rate areas to help prevent fatalities, he explained.

They investigated six fatal accidents in the county in 2012, and found that all but one occurred primarily because drivers failed to stay in their lanes, according to data Abruzzo provided. Factors like unsafe speed, weather and glare also contributed to these acci-



The segment of Route 392 between North Road and the Village of Dryden line had the highest crash rate of any arterial road segment in a 2000-2010 study of Tompkins County roads. SIMON WHEELER / STAFF PHOTOS

dents.

In addition to stopping speeders, drunken drivers, aggressive drivers and distracted drivers, they're enforcing seat belt use, Little explained. They also used targeted enforcement to educate people on traffic safety, he said.

Little and Abruzzo also attribute Tompkins County's traffic safety record to its citizens. The main business in the county is education, which Tompkins County drivers appear to reflect, Abruzzo said.

Route 13 accidents

Route 13 is problematic, because it's heavily traveled, Abruzzo said.

Last year, state police investigated 18 accidents on Route 13 in Dryden, including one fatal accident near Route 366, according to Abruzzo's data. One of the other fatal accidents in 2012 occurred on Route 366 itself, and two others occurred on Route 13 in Newfield.

At the request of the Elmira Star-Gazette and The Ithaca Journal, the state Department of Transportation is compiling accident data for Route 13 between Cortland and the route's end in Horseheads. That information will be explored in a future installment of this series.

The dangers of deer

There were about 5,200 deer accidents in the county between 2000 and 2010, or roughly 500 a year, according to the council's report. Dryden saw the highest number of

deer accidents.

De Aragon was surprised by the number.

While they don't conduct surveys to estimate deer populations, feedback from local officials and property managers indicate that deer populations are very high — likely in excess of 100 deer per square mile — in more developed areas of Tompkins County, Department of Environmental Conservation officials said.

To spur hunting and help communities control overabundant deer populations, the DEC established a Deer Management Focus Area in central Tompkins County.

Transportation alternatives

Ithaca and other communities are examining how they can make themselves more walkable and bike-able in the near and long term.

All in all, however, the county hasn't accommodated bike traffic well, de Aragon said. Though there are many bike racks on buses and in other areas, there is a latent demand for better bike corridors.

"When you look around, the mode that is least served by facilities is bikes," he said, adding that this is mainly true in the urban areas.

Greater bike use would reduce congestion and the need for cars, he said.

For N.Y. Senate coalition, major tests still to come

By Jon Campbell
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ALBANY — On paper, Democrats in the Senate could walk into the chamber and pass items such as an increase in the minimum wage and a moratorium on hydraulic fracturing.

But in Albany, theory and reality don't always line up.

The fate of those bills and a slew of others favored by Democrats — including changes to the state's abortion laws and a publicly funded system for financing political campaigns — will likely rest on the coalition of Democrats and Republicans that control the Senate. And those who support the issues will be leaning hard on the five-member Independent Democratic Conference, or IDC, to make sure they're passed.

"I think this is going to be the great challenge, whether the bipartisan coalition can effectively govern," said Assembly Majority Leader Joseph Morelle, D-Irondequoit, Monroe County. "That was the promise at the beginning of this year. Now is when you are going to see that proposition put to its test."

The IDC entered into the power-sharing agreement with the GOP in January, keeping the Republicans partially in power despite 33 registered Democrats being elected to the chamber last November.

The breakaway Democrats, led by Bronx Sen. Jeff Klein, pledged to push a "progressive" agenda. And on Jan. 15, they got off to a quick start, partnering with Senate Democrats and a group of Republicans to pass a broad package of new gun control measures.

Now, Democrats in the Assembly and Senate are

trying to increase pressure on the group to pass other legislation that had stalled under Republican control.

The Assembly this week passed two bills supported by Democrats in both chambers, but opposed by Senate Republican leadership: a two-year moratorium on hydrofracking and a bump in the minimum wage from \$7.25 to \$9 an hour, with future increases tied to inflation. The move was done, in part, to put pressure on the Senate, where the IDC carries similar bills.

Sen. David Carlucci, a member of the IDC, said he and the others in the caucus "stepped into this knowing that there would be some major pressure." The goal, he said, isn't to ram through a specific agenda, but rather to find compromise among Republicans and Democrats.

Republican leaders have said that as part of their coalition with the IDC, they would let certain bills come to the floor for a vote that they may not have previously.

Senate Deputy Republican Leader Thomas Libous, of Binghamton, pointed to a minimum-wage bill and legislation to reform New York City police's stop-and-frisk policy as examples.

"The coalition government in the Senate is different from the old Senate," Libous said. "What does that mean? That means on occasion, legislation will make the floor that will be what we call a free-for-all vote."

But at the same time, there are certain issues that Republicans oppose and have drawn a line in the sand on. Among them are provisions related to late-term abortions in a bill that codifies New York's abortion rules and, for Libous, a moratorium on fracking and shale gas drilling.

Greek

Continued from Page 1A

business," Kryger said. "Probably 50 percent of the people that have been here are the strategics, and 50 percent are just actually equity funds or financing sources."

And the prospective bidders make clear they want to keep the resort going, Kryger said.

"I have no concern about that at all," he said. "The bidders are not looking to turn this back into farmland. The bidders are looking at it as an opportunity to move forward and either enhance their own business if they're strategics and they're in the same business, or to partner with people that will go forward with the overall plan."

Greek Peak filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection in early August as it was facing an estimated \$47 million in debt coupled with the failure in January 2012 of its primary lender, Tennessee Commerce Bank, of Franklin, Tenn.

The Federal Deposit Insurance Corp. assumed the ski resort's debt load when the Tennessee bank failed. The FDIC has since financed credit that provided operating cash to Greek Peak.

The resort has expanded in recent years with the Hope Lake Lodge and indoor water park, a conference facilities, and a year-round adventure center with a roller coaster-like mountain coaster ride and zip line, as well as a relo-

cated and expanded snow tubing area. With about 1,000 employees at its seasonal peak, it's among Cortland County's largest employers, which prompted U.S. Sen. Charles Schumer, D-N.Y., to more than once urge the FDIC to help it remain open and provide jobs.

After a very poor snow season for the industry in 2011-12, the ski and snowboard resort has had generally favorable conditions this winter, with all lifts and trails reported open going into the first weekend of March. Last year, the season was winding down with bare trails at this point in the season.

Kryger said revenue was off about 30 percent last year from the three-year average projections, and this year is off 10 percent to 15 percent, though occupancy at Hope Lake Lodge is up. He added that chatter about the resort's case and speculation about poor maintenance may have contributed to the decline, but with FDIC financing, it has been able to operate as normal.

"The good part of what the federal government did with their DIP (debt-or-in-possession) loan financing in here is they gave us the opportunity to run it the way you would normally run it if government wasn't involved," Kryger said.

Greek Peak has not begun advertising season pass sales for next season because who would get the revenue is in dispute, though the pricing has been determined and will likely be ready to go after March 21, Kryger said.

CURIOUSITY

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