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See RENEWALS, A11 ►

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A safer intersection?

Eldridge intersection goes back to 4-way stop; move angers Guin, town mayor

By ED HOWELL
Eagle Senior Writer

ELDRIDGE — The Alabama Department of Transportation (ALDOT) has quietly changed the intersection of Highways 78 and 13 in Eldridge from a two-way stop to a four-way stop, frustrating House Majority Leader Ken Guin, D-Carbon Hill and Eldridge Mayor Bobbie Jean Dodd.

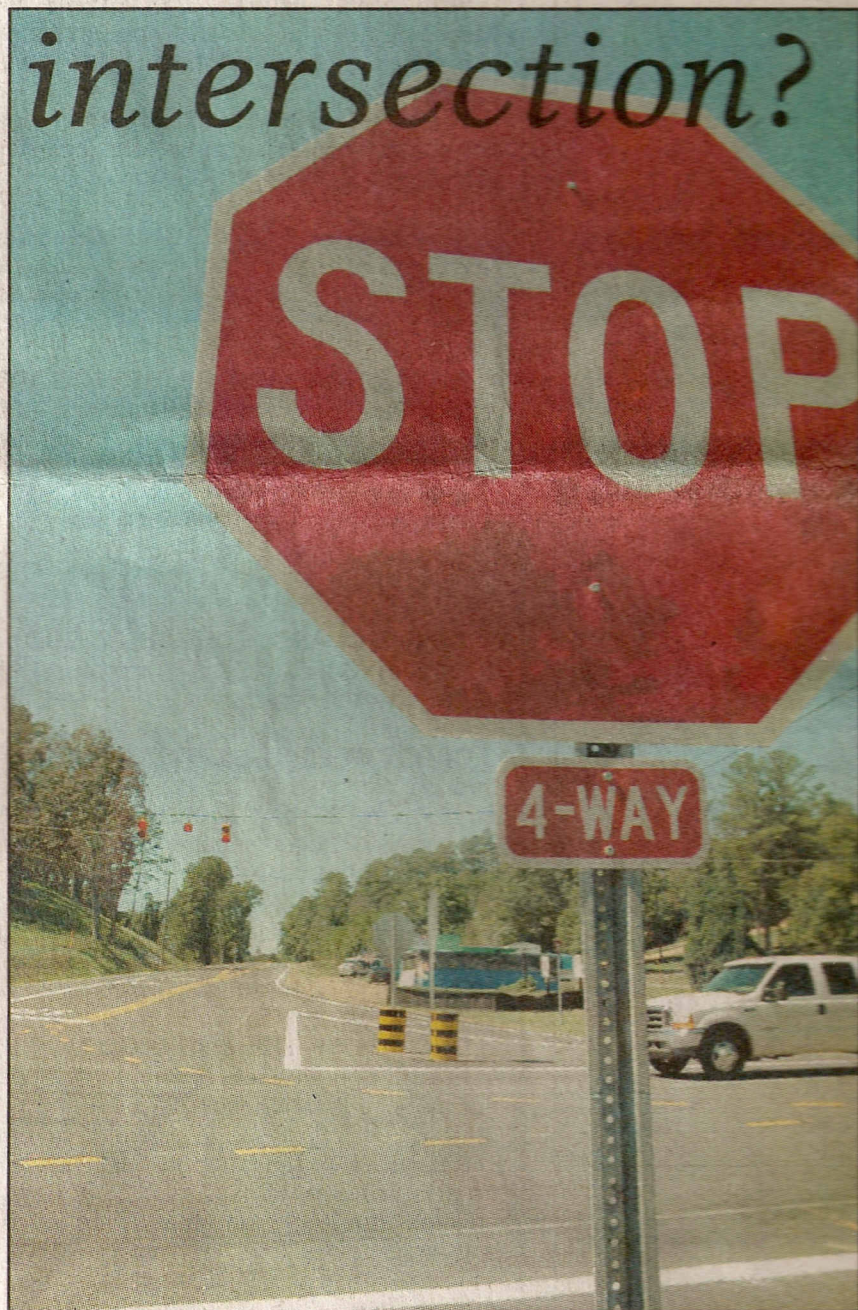
"I'm upset. I'm just scared about it being a four-way," Dodd said, explaining she is afraid drivers used to coming down Highway 78 (also known as Highway 118) without stopping will not pay attention to any signs, resulting in more accidents. She said she thinks the changeover occurred on Thursday.

ALDOT workers were making markings at the intersection Friday, while four-way stop signs and a red flashing light were in place, as well as new turn lanes.

On the east end of the intersection, temporary signs to show men were working were in place as far back as Kelley Cemetery. More permanent markings, which also includes large lettering on the road ("STOP AHEAD") and speed breakers, started at about Smothers Avenue, where the speed limit was posted at 45 mph.

The move is one of a series of changes at the intersection over the years, Guin pointed out. Until recently, drivers had the right of way on Highway 78, forcing traffic on Highway 13 to stop.

See INTERSECTION, A11 ►



Daily Mountain Eagle - Ed Howell

The intersection of Highway 78 and Highway 13 in Eldridge was transformed last week into a four-way stop, complete with signs, a flashing light and wording on the road itself.

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Heritage Day being
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Intersection

No public notification was given of the change. The *Daily Mountain Eagle* received word Thursday night from an area resident who noticed the change.

"I'm extremely upset with the Highway Department," Guin said Friday. "This is one of the most dangerous intersections in Walker County.

"The Highway Department, over the years since I've been in the Legislature, has gone back and forth on how they want to deal with this interchange," Guin said. "Finally, it had something in place with something that was saving lives. There had been fewer wrecks in recent years than before. Now they've gone back to the old system, and I'm extremely concerned. I got a call yesterday from Scotty Tucker in Eldridge, and Scotty was concerned about it, and we talked about it. I've expressed that concern in the past to the Highway Department.

"I don't know what's motivating this at the Highway Department, but I feel like they've made a huge mistake," Guin said. "One time it was a four-way stop. There was a time when there was no stop — it was a two-way stop. One time it was a four-way stop with flashing lights. And that flashing light was the best thing.

"I'm not only calling, but I'm confirming my complaints in writing to them. I don't under-

stand it," he said, adding he is worried this could cost lives in the process.

"I don't know what's motivated this at the Highway Department, but I feel like they've made a huge mistake..."

**Rep. Ken Guin,
on a change that made
an intersection in a
four-way stop**

"I'm extremely upset of how they've re-engineered this intersection, and I don't believe they've done it correctly," he said. "I don't know how many times it has been changed since I've been in the Legislature, but it's at least three (times). I think it's four."

Guin said the intersection is "not as busy as it was" since Future Interstate 22 has opened up north of the area, "but it is still a highly traveled intersection. The problem is not so much the volume of traffic on it, but that intersection sort of sneaks up on you. That's the big problem. You've got to have a good system of notifying people as they come up through there that, hey, you've got a major intersection you're coming to.

...said it has provided technology-based services for over 20 years and calling itself a "consultative-based web develop-

...to 4 p.m. Monday through Friday. You can e-mail the office at www.walkerprobate-@bellsouth.net.

From A1

"That's one of those you kind of come up to, and if you're coming north on 13, it's one that just kind of hits you all of a sudden. If you're coming east on 78, you rise over the top of that hill, and if you're not familiar with that road, you may not realize these are two major roads coming together," Guin said. "I think that's the big problem."

Guin said later in the day by e-mail, "I have dictated a letter to the Division Engineer and Highway Director."

Dodd said ALDOT officials did not seek the city's advice, and that it was only when city officials approached the department with rumors that they recently found out the change was coming.

"We've known about it for a couple of weeks," after Fire Chief Ralph Tittle and others heard about rumors, Dodd said, leading officials to approach ALDOT officials.

Dodd said the reasoning given to officials concerned coal trucks coming from Little Texas and the higher weight limit on Highway 78 than on Future I-22. She said ALDOT representatives told local officials that coal trucks might still try to run through the area. They said that they would try the four-way stop for a while and could always change back if it didn't work.

"I'm hoping it's going to work out, but I've got my doubts," Dodd said.

Dodd, who lives a short dis-

tance from the intersection, said 113 accidents, 98 injuries and five deaths have occurred at the intersection since 1998. However, she said in 2006 through August, when it was a two-way stop, only eight accidents and four injuries had occurred.

Many accidents occur when Highway 13 traffic pulls out into Highway 78, she said, but said that she is concerned that the problem will worsen with a four-way stop affecting the traffic on Highway 78.

Dodd said that she is pleased with turning lanes installed a couple of months ago at the intersection. However, she thinks traffic will be accustomed to coming through Highway 78 without stopping and will not pay attention to signs, adding she is now concerned that the state will compound the problem by eventually taking away the flashing red light.

She added that, with the number of accidents worked by local firemen, they should have been asked for advice before switching to a four-way stop.

Guin's office had recommended a petition, Dodd said, but added she abandoned that idea when the state moved to make physical arrangements to the intersection before the petition could be drawn up.

ALDOT officials in Montgomery and Walker County could not be reached for comment.

Jail

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From A1