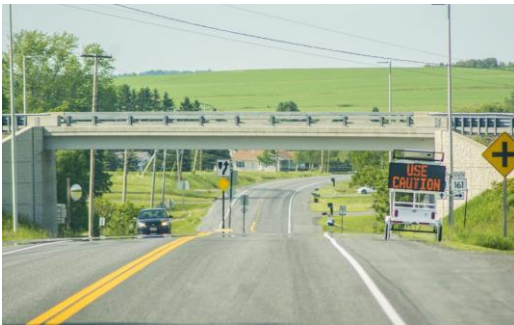


## DOT installs temporary fixes at intersection where Caribou teen recently died

Christopher Bouchard | June 18, 2020 | [Click here to view online.](#)



Roadside signs were recently installed before the Van Buren Road connector urging motorists to use caution when approaching the intersection. Earlier this month, a fatal accident and another non-fatal accident occurred at the connector. Credit: Chris Bouchard / BDN

CARIBOU, Maine — The Maine Department of Transportation will evaluate the Van Buren connector in Caribou in response to community concern about the rising number of crashes in that area, and has installed temporary fixes in the interim.

Two crashes this month that were just three days apart at the same intersection are the latest of seven that have occurred since the Van Buren connector road was built in 2012. The connector allows large trucks to bypass downtown Caribou. Two of the crashes resulted in fatalities.

The DOT evaluation that will begin the week of July 13 will determine how to make the intersection safer, Robert Watson, Maine DOT Region 5 director, said.

Aroostook EMA Director Darren Woods credited Aroostook EMA Deputy Director John Gibson and his wife Christina Kane-Gibson with contacting Maine DOT shortly after the most recent fatal accident occurred.

“They live right by that intersection and they are very interested in making sure safety precautions are put into place as soon as possible,” he said. “They called Maine DOT and offered to do whatever they can, including providing a piece of their land on their side of the intersection if it can help.”



Watson said that short-term fixes are in the works, even while the DOT is obtaining accident reports and talking with state and local officials about the intersection prior to the audit.

“We had a paint crew come in this week and redo all the striping and do stop bars, and we’re looking at changing the speed limit through that intersection from 50 to 45,” he said.

DOT also will install three-and-a-half-foot-tall tubular markers to alert motorists merging into the intersection, and Caribou police have placed a speed sign next to the road urging motorists to slow down.

“Once it’s time to look at the audit and we get everyone together with our traffic engineer, we’ll look at what’s taking place and what improvements need to be made,” Watson said.

Watson said the intersection’s structure requires motorists to be cautious when merging, but that it does not outright obstruct visibility.

“I went through that intersection [June 16] and the visibility is adequate,” he said. “It’s one of those intersections that you can’t just roll through — you have to stop and pay attention.”

Caribou Police Chief Michael Gahagan said he’s noted that the connector is particularly dangerous for motorists merging onto Van Buren Road and turning back toward Caribou, which involves crossing the northbound lane to get into the southbound lane.

Caribou City Councilor Doug Morrell suggested the city be proactive when the council discussed the intersection during its meeting on June 15.

“It’s not just because I knew the young lady or her family,” said Morrell. “Whether I knew them or not, we’re losing community members and it’s a tragedy. I’d like to see the council be proactive, and send a letter off to see if we can maybe bring the speed down.”