

## Another Pedestrian Struck and Killed

Crosswalk on Richmond Highway at center of controversy about pedestrian safety.

[Gale Curcio](#)

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Willie Elston will never forget what he saw the morning of July 5. Sitting in his truck in front of Griffin Plumbing & Heating, he was on the way out to a job around 8 a.m. Right before his eyes, he saw Brenda Lewis struck by a car in the crosswalk at Highland Lane and Richmond Highway.

“She never saw it coming — there was a blind spot,” Elston said. I was no more than five feet away. By the time we saw it, it was too late to warn her. If the lawn care truck had never stopped, she would still be here.”

That blind spot was a Town & Country lawn care truck that had stopped in the northbound curb lane to let Lewis cross the street. Looking to the north for cars coming southbound, Lewis never saw the 1999 Toyota Camry that came driving past the stopped truck and struck her. The impact was so severe that Elston said she was thrown 35 to 40 feet in the air before hitting the ground.

“If the impact didn’t hit her, coming down alone would have killed her,” he said. “My day has not been right since then.”

Elston said that the truck departed immediately after the accident; at least 10 other cars drove by as Lewis lay in the road.

“Cars kept driving by,” Elston said. “The girl who hit her [22-year-old Annandale-area woman] — she stopped right away. She was petrified.”

“That’s hard to live with,” said Glen Eccleston who also works for Griffin Plumbing & Heating. He was inside the store when it happened.

“I saw the whole thing and called 911,” he said. “She came down right on her head.”

LEWIS, A 52-YEAR-OLD resident of the 8500 block of Richmond Highway, had crossed that same street for the past 25 years to catch the bus to Fort Belvoir. Richard Arndt, chief of Information Strategies, Fort Belvoir Public Affairs Office, said that Lewis was an employee of the Main Post Exchange (PX), operated by the Army and Air Force Exchange Service. Her family had worried that it was becoming too dangerous to cross. After the accident, she was transported to Inova Mount Vernon Hospital where she was pronounced dead. Alcohol and speed do not appear to be factors at this time. No charges have been placed at this time, however the police investigation continues. This is the 25th fatal crash in Fairfax County this year.

“That’s not a good place for a crosswalk,” said Capt. Mike Kline, commander, Mount Vernon District Station. “It gives pedestrians a false sense of security. The truck driver thought he was doing something right by stopping.”

The problem is that there is a 45 mph speed limit in that stretch of the road. Motorists have the right of way, because they are not required to stop for a pedestrian in a crosswalk unless the speed limit is 35 mph or less.

Harold Aderholt, vice president for operations, Town & Country, said, “Our driver was interviewed by the police yesterday. He is fine and there is no damage to our truck and no harm to our employees. We offer our sincere condolences to the family of the victim.”

WHEN FRANK KOHN, who chairs the Transportation Committee for the Mount Vernon Council of Citizens Associations (MVCCA), learned about Tuesday morning’s pedestrian fatality, the first thing he asked was whether or not there was a safety island. When he realized that there wasn’t one, he said,



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Brenda Lewis was struck in this crosswalk as she tried to cross Richmond Highway.

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“This is what we’re concerned about. They need safety islands so that they can look to one side, get to the middle, and then look the other way — and not have to make a mad dash.”

He then started talking about the danger of the non-signalized pedestrian crosswalk located at the intersection of Richmond Highway and Highland Lane. When he realized that was where she was hit, he said, “This is the intersection we were concerned about. It is worse than having nothing — it gives pedestrians a false sense of security.”

Kohn had asked that the crosswalk be removed. Instead bright yellow pedestrian signs were installed on either side of the crosswalk. They were designed to give the crosswalk more visibility.

Kohn and his committee are aware of the problems with pedestrian safety and had unanimously passed the Pedestrian Safety Resolution at the June meeting of the Transportation Committee. It was introduced at the June MVCCA meeting and deferred so that the Public Safety Committee could review it as well. That committee will meet this evening and present their changes to the Transportation Committee. The final resolution will be presented at this month’s council meeting. Kohn doesn’t anticipate that they will make major changes. While the resolution makes several points, the outcome Kohn wants is for Supervisor Gerry Hyland and state Sen. Linda “Toddy” Puller (D-36) to spearhead a pilot project — installing a safety island in front of the Herbert Harris Post Office/Wyngate Housing Project.

“WE’RE HOPING that there are public safety funds available for the project,” said Robert Brubaker, director, Metroped Inc., who will be meeting with the Public Safety Committee this week.

Brubaker said that he had always pointed out that the crosswalk at Highland Lane and Richmond Highway was the worst example of a crosswalk. Pedestrians think that it is safe to cross there, yet motorists aren’t clear as to what their responsibility is.

“A pedestrian is dead and no one is at fault,” Brubaker said.

Ryan Hall, spokesperson for the Virginia Department of Transportation said that the crosswalk has been there for at least a dozen years and may have been there as long as 30 years.

"It is properly marked and there is a clear line of sight," Hall said.

He said that they are aware of the accident and are doing an evaluation of whether or not the crosswalk should be removed. They will research how many accidents have occurred there and also, how many people use that crosswalk.

"We're looking into seeing how it is used and the impact of moving it," Hall said. Because there are bus stops on both sides, it may be more dangerous to eliminate the crosswalk. If the crosswalk remains, perhaps flashing yellow lights could be added that a pedestrian could activate when preparing to cross.

"We're not sure what we're going to do, but hopefully our recommendation will fix the problem, if there is one," Hall said.

Brubaker believes that unless it’s really well designed, a crosswalk like this is less safe than other options. He believes that even signalized crosswalks aren’t always safe because the pedestrian has to rely on the motorist doing what’s legal — stopping for a red light or checking for pedestrians before they make a the right turn. He believes that if pedestrians start using signalized crosswalks, when one pushes a button to cross, it will bring traffic to its knees. He prefers installing safety islands where there is a good line of sight.

“It lets pedestrians be in control of their safety,” he said.

Earl Flanagan, who met with the Transportation Committee this week, said, “If we implement this resolution, we’ll be far ahead of the game. One of the things that the committee should be aware of is the fact that they are now introducing more houses right up to the roadway. There is a denser population and this subject [pedestrian safety] warrants all the attention it is getting.”