

Local Road Safety Project Spotlight: Mini-Roundabout at Nicholls State

By Rudynah Entera Capone, MPA

The first of the three new roundabouts in Thibodaux is now completed. This mini-roundabout, to be exact, is located at the intersection of Audubon Avenue and Ardoyne Drive on the Nicholls State University (NSU) campus.

Multiple challenges had to be overcome along the way, including getting the campus officials' buy-in, clarifying some feasibility concerns, validating a data-driven effort, and getting funding approved through the Local Road Safety Program (LRSP). LRSP is one of DOTD's Local Public Agencies (LPA) programs that provides parishes and municipalities access to federal-aid funds to spend for safety improvements on local streets.

Thanks to LRSP funding and the collaboration between the South Central Regional Safety Coalition's (SCRSC) stakeholders, this project came to life, and it is positively seen to help alleviate the flow of traffic around NSU as roundabouts are designed to do. Research has found roundabouts to be effective in reducing injury crashes by 75% at intersections where stop signs previously existed. Crash data for Audubon-Ardoyne will be monitored over the next five years to evaluate its impact on crash reduction.

An article in the campus newspaper, *Nicholls Worth*, shared that people might be confused how to use the mini-roundabout. As in many areas, it's apparent that this is a major concern, but local safety stakeholders also clarified that the project's goal is to address the bottlenecks, especially when nearby school drop-off and pickup times conflict. At the Louisiana Highway Safety Summit 2019, LTAP staff member Rudynah Capone asked Louisiana State Police Troop C Commander Captain Frank Besson, Jr. for a comment on this new development. "It was very difficult and challenging in the beginning. We saw cars driving over the roundabout itself, but now, motorists are slowly learning how to drive around it, not over it," the Captain informed. SCRSC Coordinator and SCPDC Planner Cassie Parker shared how the coalition partners are working toward implementing enforcement and education efforts that use the statewide campaign slogan, "Roundabouts Save Lives."

How It All Began

The beginnings of this project could be traced back to when Audubon was identified as a safety concern in the



Houma-Thibodaux region. A formalized "safety concern" sheet was submitted in 2010-2011 through the South Central Regional Safety Coalition, which is one of the nine multidisciplinary coalitions established as a mechanism to implement the statewide Strategic Highway Safety Plan (SHSP) at the local level. The South Central coalition is administered by the South Central Planning and Development Commission (SCPDC) in Houma.

The safety concerns on Audubon Avenue and its intersecting roads were then reviewed and deliberated by the coalition's stakeholders. After a series of discussions and crash data analyses, a Road Safety Assessment (RSA) was conducted in 2012 by the Louisiana LTAP Center, in partnership with the SCPDC, Thibodaux Police Department, LA State Police Troop C, DOTD Houma Sub-district, and the City of Thibodaux Department of Public Works.

The Audubon-Ardoyne intersection is at its busiest during early morning drop-offs and afternoon pickups where the NSU's daycare facility and a charter school also sit nearby.

The RSA team recommended some short-term treatments like speed enforcement, removal of eastbound parking, and restriping of turn, center, and edge lines. As a long-term countermeasure, the team suggested the installation of a roundabout, which came to fruition five years later. The short-term fixes were done (in the interim) while the roundabout idea went through the project development process.

The Thibodaux mini-roundabout is believed to be the first constructed in Louisiana using federal safety funds. The differences between a mini-roundabout and a standard sized roundabout include the size, allowing it usually to be constructed within the existing footprint of the intersection and, therefore, minimizing right-of-way requirements and the paved, traversable center island, which reduces the obstruction for the occasional large vehicle, making this solution ideal for locally owned roads.

See page 7 for more information on the "Roundabouts Save Lives" campaign.