

Brookdale commuters make Route 520 unsafe

By CAROL BAKER

Brookdale has grown tremendously from its founding in 1967 to a student population of 11,876 students in 2001. Brookdale, with its all-commuting student population, is expected to increase its student enrollment by 8 to 12 percent this fall. Brookdale's answer to its growing number of students has been to pave more parking lots. Yet Brookdale students still have difficulty finding a parking place.

Brookdale has done nothing to encourage car pooling or public transportation. An NJ Transit bus stops at Brookdale once an hour — far from a convenient schedule — and the number of riders is low. Parking is free at Brookdale.

The county has recognized the traffic problems on County Route 520, the primary road leading to Brookdale, and commissioned a traffic study of

Route 520 in Lincroft and Red Bank. The study's recommendation was to widen 520 as well as County Route 50 (Lincroft-Middletown Road, and Swimming River Road). It also plans to create a center turning lane on 520 in Red Bank.

Widening the roads in an area with many stores and pedestrians is not the answer, as was tragically demonstrated by the recent death of a teenage girl in Holmdel trying to cross the five lanes of Laurel Avenue. The county has acknowledged the problems of pedestrians crossing Route 520 in Lincroft by creating a pedestrian-only phase at the light at Hurleys Lane and 520.

However, a pedestrian-only phase does not stop motorists from running red lights at 50 mph (in a 35-mph zone and 25-mph school zone) or motorists making illegal right turns at a no-turn-on-red intersection. Pedestrians continue to cross 520 between the

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pharmacy lot and Dunkin Donuts lot, rather than walking the extra distance to the Hurleys Lane light and back to cross the street.

Residents have recommended a landscaped center island in Route 520 at the pharmacy entrance that would also serve to direct left turns. The county's response has been that a center island would encourage people to cross at a dangerous location. What about the people who already do?

The county's own pedestrian count was that 16 people crossed at that location from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. on a week-

day. That's 832 people per year, not including weekends, early morning and evening hours. Any one of those pedestrians could have been killed. A center island with crosswalk would make the location less dangerous for both pedestrians and motorists making left turns.

Widening 520 at the Lincroft School is nothing short of ludicrous. Children have to cross a dangerous five-lane highway to go to the public library or ball fields. Motorists will be put in jeopardy by moving the merger of 520 westbound to an area with six driveways. The existing merger is between Route 50 and Phalanx Road, where there is just one driveway. The proposed widening will force drivers to navigate a lane merger while school buses, soccer parents, library patrons and assisted living visitors are turning into and out of driveways.

Lincroft's traffic problems are a direct result of Brookdale's expanding population. The county's response

should not be to spend tax dollars to expand the roads, but rather to have its county college implement a plan to reduce the number of one-passenger vehicles that clog our roads on their way to and from Brookdale.

Brookdale should charge a substantial fee for parking and then use the revenues from both parking permits and fines to pay for free buses from major areas, such as Asbury Park, Neptune, Red Bank, Hazlet and Freehold. In addition, Brookdale should supply a free shuttle bus from the commuter parking lot at Garden State Parkway Exit 109, as well as the train station in Red Bank.

The county has requested written comments about their plans by July 17. Please write to Freeholder Thomas J. Powers and County Engineer Theodore Giannchini at Hall of Records, 1 East Main St., Freehold, N.J. 07728.

Carol Baker, of Middletown, is a member of the Lincroft Task Force.