# Road rage: Motorists still feeling frustrations

*(by Linda Dillman, staff writer - August 16, 2008)*
In 1990, Columbus acknowledged the Brice/Tussing Road area had undergone a transformation from rural farmland to a burgeoning suburban community and suggested existing streets be improved to accommodate increased traffic volume.

Some things never change.

Nearly 20 years later, traffic continues to snake down Brice Road, parents are stacked at a standstill to pick up their children from Tussing Elementary, and residents waiting to exit developments off Refugee Road are frustrated by long delays.

## The plan

Citing their own data in the Brice/Tussing Area Plan approved by the Columbus City Council on Nov. 5, 1990, which is yet to be updated, the capital city noted the area recorded substantial growth increases in traffic since 1980 and circulation "has been greatly impeded by the rapid urbanization of the Brice/Tussing planning area. One of the objectives of this plan is to encourage a roadway improvement strategy that will anticipate growth in the area and ensure that streets will serve increased traffic volumes."

Columbus Planning Manager Adrienne Jolly acknowledged the plan is "pretty old" and said it is on a list to be updated. Although Jolly said the area is a high priority, no date has been set to update the Brice/Tussing plan.

According to the Brice/Tussing Area Plan from November 1990, "It has become increasingly cumbersome for area residents to move around efficiently and safely in the Brice/Tussing area. Peak traffic periods occur during morning and evening rush hour. This crush of vehicles belongs to residents commuting to work, many in downtown Columbus. Other peak and difficult periods occur on weekends caused by traffic from shoppers visiting stores and fast food restaurants."

## Continued frustration

Homeowners are still waiting for needed improvements and say they have expressed their concerns to Columbus for a number of years.

In 2003, a Park Place community meeting - attended by 30 residents, Pickerington administrators and Columbus representatives - was held to discuss the Tussing Road bridge, the intersection at Hines and Refugee, and the physical nature of the roadways.

Two years later, more than two dozen residents attended a meeting organized by Frank and Katelyn Sattler regarding the same issues.

Today, the Tussing Blockwatch continues to raise similar concerns regarding signalization at Refugee and Hines Roads, increased traffic volume, crosswalks and sidewalks, and the need for a traffic light at Tussing Elementary.

Summer Moynihan, a Blockwatch coordinator for four local neighborhoods, said she discussed concerns with city of Columbus representatives in the spring and outlined issues of interest expressed by residents. She reported a 20 mph speed limit sign was recently posted near the Tussing building and plans call for the installation of a flashing light this fall to alert motorist they are in a school zone.

"They told me Tussing Road is on a list for resurfacing in 2009, but budget cuts were one of the reasons the road won't be widened at this time. Everyone is aware it is a huge problem," Moynihan said. "Tussing Elementary tried to get a traffic light at the school, which would help, but it won't cure the road problems.

"It's not just a matter of doing one thing or another, but of the entire process," Moynihan said. "The city needs to hear about the problems throughout the area."

## Possible solutions

In a letter to Blockwatch organizers, Patricia Austin, an administrator in Columbus' Transportation Division, said there are a number of components to the issue. Installation of a traffic signal must be supported by an engineering study, but Austin cautioned similar situations tend to not warrant signalization.

"One solution may be the use of law enforcement to direct traffic during the morning and afternoon school hours," Austin

said. "Our observations in the morning school hours indicate site circulation problems that may contribute to the level of congestion. This is an issue that will require input and cooperation from the Pickerington School District."

As for a traffic light at Refugee and Hines, Moynihan said the group is exploring the possibility for each Blockwatch to address a petition to the city advising them of entire area's concern with the intersection.

"I know that the community has raised this issue many times before, but this time we're going to hit them with numbers they haven't seen before and we aren't going to stop until the intersection is fixed," Moynihan said.

"What we plan to do is to get all of the area Blockwatches up and running. Obviously, the road concerns are safety concerns. We'll have everybody there in place.  After trying for so many years to get something done and nothing happening, people have said it's a dead subject, but if enough people stand up, we can be heard. The number of accidents that happen at that intersection is huge."

Pickerington Mayor Mitch O'Brien said, that since he took office, he has been trying to discuss common border problems with the city of Columbus and that Pickerington is investing a lot of money in traffic lights north and south, but also looking for options to move people east and west.

"I try to take a broader approach to the city of Pickerington. I wanted to know if they (Columbus) had any plans and said it's a communal issue," said O'Brien regarding a recent meeting with Columbus Public Service Director Mark Kelsey. "Refugee Road is not on their plan, unfortunately. There was a study to realign Refugee and Hines, but funding was cut for the study. They (Columbus) put a lot of high density housing along Refugee Road."

O'Brien said despite the local outcry regarding the area, he was told only seven complaints were logged into Columbus' automated 311 system.

"The software takes a map and plots the number of complaints," O'Brien said. "They said the information is used when looking at problem areas and the more complaints that are registered, the closer the city looks at the data.

"It's important that people use the 311 system. It really does work."