

# Traffic improvements aimed at increasing pedestrian safety

By Chris Neidenberg, for the River Road Improvement Corporation

Strides have been made within the last five years at improving traffic flow through and along River Road, and the River Road Improvement Corporation (RRIC) – working in tandem with borough officials and business owners – is continuing its ongoing commitment in this area.

A private and public partnership earlier coalesced in lobbying Bergen County to bring significant upgrades in signaling, and performing some widening at, the Berdan Avenue and Fair Lawn intersections (along county roads).

Now, this same group is working on an initiative for improving conditions which have long caused serious bottlenecks and snarls in the busy Maple Avenue intersection.

At least one frustrated major employer with a concern for his workers, vehicles and business said an acceptable solution, which satisfies Bergen County and business owners operating near the site, will definitely improve the climate for conducting commerce in the area.

Borough Engineer Ken Garrison said roughly \$400,000 to \$500,000 was previously committed to enhancing the Berdan Avenue and Fair Lawn Avenue sites. Work at both locations included installing new curbs, some repaving, putting up new traffic lights and improving turning radiuses.

Garrison said this work also entailed acquiring some private property. On all county roads, he explained, the municipalities are responsible for developing plans and conducting all negotiations with affected landowners.

He added that three of the four newer traffic lights at Fair Lawn and River Road feature special left arrow turning signals whose timing permits dedicated turn lanes the opportunity of moving first and before general traffic movements. While the actual work began about five years ago, Garrison recalled that the early legwork, in making these improvements a reality started, as early as 1995.

Arthur Levine, a corporation trustee from the beginning (the RRIC formed in 1993), said the process in initiating these improvements showed

how the corporation could serve as a useful sounding board – needed in persuading that government officials take action on solving problems affecting merchants.

"Our initial objective was to first improve the intersection at Fair Lawn Avenue," Levine recalled. "Quentin Wiest (then the county's public works superintendent and a former Ridgewood mayor) was serving on our board at the time. He helped us develop a dialogue with the county, which led to its making the commitment for improving the intersection.

"We were very fortunate because, at the same time, the county was also willing to make improvements on Berdan Avenue," Levine added.

But the corporation also contributed funds in improving conditions for member merchants around Fair Lawn Avenue and River Road, said RRIC President Robert Landzettel.

"To make the improvements necessary at that intersection, the county had to remove 15 on-street parking spaces," recalled Landzettel, another original corporation member and a former Fair Lawn mayor. "To assure that our merchants would not permanently lose this valuable customer space, our corporation came forward and bought an old house on a property on George Street. By demolishing this house, and replacing it with a parking lot, we picked up 25 new spaces to compensate for this loss."

In looking back at the changes made so far, Landzettel said they have helped create a freer flow of traffic and reduced tie-ups. He cited improving traffic conditions as essential in enhancing a given area's business climate.

He explained that the goal along River Road has been trying to increase potential customer "traffic" while keeping vehicular traffic – containing some of those potential customers – flowing smoothly.

"If you've been in an area that you know tends to be seriously tied up during peak traffic periods, you're going to do everything you can to avoid it," Landzettel explained. "But if you know you're going to be able to get through an intersection, generally, without major headaches, you're going to keep using the route. Our hope is you might see a business along the way which appeals to you."

"It's like that old Yogi Berra saying," said Levine.



Maple Avenue looking west from Weber Place

"That restaurant was so crowded, nobody came."

Rich Brown, president of KEM Manufacturing, is a businessman in the corridor with a somewhat different worry.

Brown runs a wholesale auto parts distribution business—right at the very busy Maple Avenue intersection and next to Paterson—where trucks must make pickups in moving parts to area retail stores

"This is a very bad location in major need of improvement," said Brown, citing constant bottlenecks and other problems that, he said, can back up traffic heading west along Maple Avenue all the way to the Pathmark Shopping Center.

"The county has to move forward on a plan," Brown urged. "These conditions also adversely affect Fair Lawn Industries and Rivara's Grill House."

Brown said any final plan must include new curbing in certain spots, road widening, and in his case, relocation of a utility pole stationed right near where trucks must enter to pick up goods. The pole is on the south side of Maple.

"Trucks coming up Maple are clipping this utility pole every day, and it would knock out our power," complained Brown. "Things got so bad, we had to rearrange our power (distribution arrangement)."

Though Brown maintained that discussions with the county have seemingly taken forever, Garrison insisted that significant progress has been made recently.

"The county has come up with a conceptual plan, but it's going to require additional discussion and negotiations with some of the property owners," he explained. "Yet I'm confident that we will arrive at an acceptable solution."

*This is the third in a five-part series examining various initiatives that have been made to improve the River Road corridor, through the efforts of the River Road Improvement Corporation.*

Articles deal with:

- Financial institutions "banking" on River Roads future
- Grants program brings "signs of improvement" to River Road
- Traffic flow improvements
- New property investment
- End of year report

## Upcoming Events

See **Classic Cars** at the Chamber Festival  
**Sunday, October 12; 11-5 p.m.**

Co-Sponsored by **Community Bank**  
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**Clowns, Balloons and Magic**  
**Saturday, October 25; 11-4 p.m.**

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