

## MOVE IT!

### A regional push for quick clearance of traffic incidents is underway.

Have you been stuck in traffic lately? Have you waited behind the wheel for what seems like hours for an accident scene up ahead to clear? Were you the one involved in the car accident, wondering if emergency equipment could get there through the traffic?

Most likely, anyone who lives and drives a vehicle in Central Florida can answer "yes" to at least one of these questions. Traffic incidents, therefore, have become a quality of life issue in our growing community due to the congestion and lack of mobility they cause; thus, the need to clear incidents as quickly as possible has become more important each day. In fact, the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) reports that nearly 60 percent of overall congestion in the region can be attributed to traffic incidents or accidents.

By definition, a traffic incident is any non-recurring event that results in the reduction of roadway capacity or an increase in traffic demand. Incidents can be predictable, such as a sporting or entertainment venue, or unpredictable, such as accidents, stalled vehicles, bad weather, cargo spills and structural failures, such as a collapsed bridge. The accidents that result in traffic back-ups on I-4 and other well-traveled arteries in the region certainly fit this description.

Citing the tangible impact of traffic congestion on the region's quality of life, Orange County Commissioner Ted B. Edwards, Chairman of METROPLAN ORLANDO, has made Traffic Incident Management (TIM) a priority issue for his term at the transportation organization's helm. TIM is the systematic, planned and coordinated use of human, institutional, mechanical and technical resources to reduce the duration and impact of traffic incidents and improve the safety of motorists, crash victims and responders. In other words, having everyone and everything working together to clear an accident scene more quickly and restore traffic flow. Orange County's effort has been dubbed Mobilizing Vehicular Impediments to Traffic, or MOVE IT.

By championing TIM regionally, Commissioner Edwards' goal is to address congestion issues from a holistic perspective. He is both fully committed to Orange County Chairman Richard T. Crotty's Mobility 20/20 initiative that will fund critical infrastructure improvements and intent on maximizing the capacity of our existing roadways.

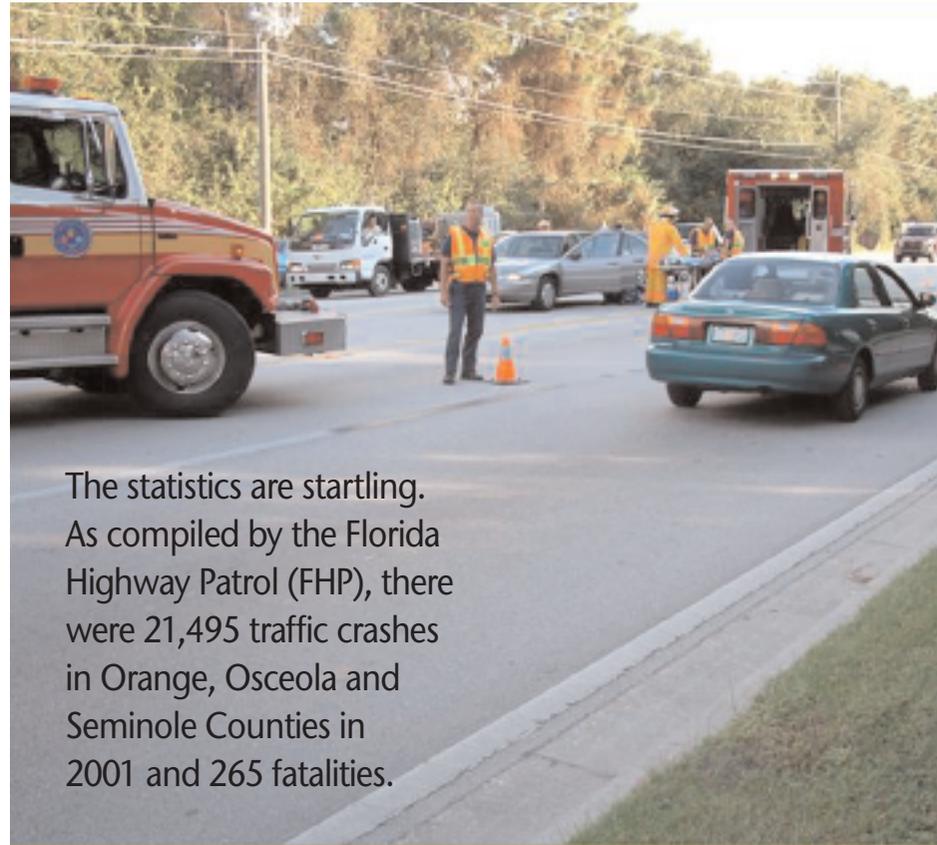
In his role as METROPLAN ORLANDO's leader, Commissioner Edwards recently convened a Traffic Incident Management Executive Forum to bring together local law enforcement, fire and rescue departments within the Orlando metropolitan area. Nearly 120 representatives from state, local, regional, private and non-profit organizations attended the forum, anxious to explore ways to clear accident scenes more quickly as a means of ensuring traveler safety and providing safer roadways for law enforcement and emergency responders.

#### Sobering Stats

The statistics are startling. As compiled by the Florida Highway Patrol (FHP), there were 21,495 traffic crashes in Orange, Osceola and Seminole Counties in 2001 and 265 fatalities. In addition, FBI statistics cite 344 accidental deaths, nationwide, of law enforcement officers in the line of duty between 1996 and 2000. Of those, 197 died in automobile accidents, 23 in motorcycle accidents and 59 were struck by a vehicle.

Further, between 13 and 33 percent of traffic accidents in Central Florida are the result of earlier accidents — the 33 percent on I-4 is the highest in the nation — and Orange County's Fire Rescue Department estimates that for every one minute responders are at an accident scene, the roadway experiences as much as five minutes in delay.

Add to these figures the 31 hours per year an average Central Florida commuter spends stuck in traffic and the \$575 each spent in wasted gas and time, the opportunity to improve transportation through better coordination of Traffic Incident Management is a "no-brainer."



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#### A Strong Commitment

The practices currently underway provide a foundation on which to build the initiative, such as the FDOT District 5 TIM Teams, the on-call personnel and I-4 Road Rangers who go to great lengths to open a roadway in the interest of public safety, the 511 Traveler Information Service, and FDOT's funding of 21 additional FHP troopers to patrol I-4.

In addition, FDOT and FHP have established an Open Roads Policy, with the goal of clearing all incidents from travel lanes on the state highway system within 90 minutes of arrival of the first responding officer.

By their presence at the Forum, the region's law enforcement, fire and rescue personnel and others involved in Commissioner Edwards' TIM endeavor showed their commitment to improved incident management techniques. The next steps, already underway, involve exploring options such as endorsing the Open Roads Policy as a tool for local governments, reviewing legislation regarding wrecker and towing operations, improving communications between responders and agencies, enhancing

the use of technology such as Intelligent Transportation Systems, supporting FHP legislatively, cross-training emergency responders and providing driver safety workshops.

Many may not know that Florida law requires us to "make every effort to move the vehicle or have it moved so as not to block the regular flow of traffic." So, do your part to keep traffic flowing. Keep your eyes on the road, keep the rubbernecking to a minimum, listen for the upcoming TIM public awareness campaign, and... "MOVE IT."



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