



Alliance *for* Community Choice *in* Transportation

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Pedestrian casualties can be blamed in part on lack of pedestrian infrastructure on Rio Road

The two pedestrians who were struck and seriously injured while trying to cross Rio Road last night were victims not only of the SUV that hit them, but also of our failure to provide the needed pedestrian infrastructure on this road. According to press reports, the pedestrians were struck while crossing near the intersection of Berkmar Drive. Despite the fact that the Berkmar crossing lies between a densely populated residential neighborhood and a variety of retail destinations, there is no crosswalk at this light. There is no pedestrian signal. And there is no island in the middle of the five-lane crossing. If there had been an island, Melissa Marsh and Robert Jones would probably have been standing on it instead of standing in the middle of the left-turn lane where they were struck.

The serious injuries to these two pedestrians yesterday evening is the latest in a series of accidents involving pedestrians over the past year on Rio Road East and West, including a fatal accident last June and one where a mother and young son were struck this past fall. One would have hoped that these accidents would cause Albemarle County and VDOT to upgrade pedestrian amenities along this road in order to prevent similar accidents. We should certainly do so now.

The lack of pedestrian infrastructure is a problem not only at the Berkmar crossing but along virtually the entire stretch of Hydraulic/Rio West/Rio East and many other County roads. The closest crosswalks to Berkmar where the pedestrians who were killed might have tried to cross instead are those on 29 (where they would have had to dodge traffic turning in all directions and at least six lanes of traffic; and the crossing at Albemarle High School (almost two miles away!), which isn't much safer. Here too there is no

island, so pedestrians trying to cross to school must cross five lanes of traffic with nowhere to hide.

The County's failure to plan for pedestrians can be seen even at their own new office building on 5th Street Extended. Despite the fact that there is a walking path along the west side of the road, there is no crosswalk at the stop light marking the intersection to the complex. Even though there is a bus stop on the office building side of the street, there is no crosswalk by which pedestrians from the west side can reach the bus stop.

The Alliance for Community Choice in Transportation is a local non-profit that has been working with local authorities to improve pedestrian safety, provide more bicycle infrastructure, and expand public transportation. These latest incidents show us how far we still have to go. We call on the County to establish a pedestrian safety task force and tackle this issue with the resources and energy the problem deserves.

ACCT representatives are available to comment further on this topic. Len Schoppa can be reached by phone at 924-3211 (w) and 295-6485 (h). Executive Director Zachary Shahan can be reached at 295-6554 (w) and (919) 265-3462 (cell). Possible interview locations: by phone, downtown, or at the Berkmar crossing.

ACCT website www.transportationchoice.org.