

# Reimagining a safer 183rd Street

## Historic traffic study provides clues for improvements

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Let's head west on 183rd Street, starting at Halsted Street. A car might be returning home from a shopping trip to Target. Maybe it just exited the expressway. It could be a driver avoiding the tollway between work and home.

Now the drivers are on 183rd, cruising down a corridor lined with closely packed driveways and side streets. The speed limit is 30 miles per hour, but most regulars and residents know drivers there often go much faster.

On bad days, these road conditions lead to crashes, many with serious injuries. In the past five years, two people lost their lives as a result of vehicle crashes on 183rd Street.

After the most recent death in summer 2020, Homewood village officials responded to residents' outcry over what they say are unsafe driving conditions on 183rd by commissioning a traffic study.

The result is the first comprehensive look at how many vehicles travel the road, the conditions drivers encounter, crashes that took place and how the village can adjust the environment to modify driver behavior and ultimately make 183rd Street a safer road to travel.

### Heading west from Halsted Street

We're back on the road with our cars headed westbound on 183rd Street from Halsted. Despite coming from such a busy intersection, they're actually in an area less prone to crashes. The study examined a 1.83-mile stretch of 183rd from Halsted to Park Avenue, dividing it into 11 zones for analysis.

"I think the perception is that there are more accidents from Center to Halsted," said Homewood Public Works Director John Schaefer. "What the study showed is that there are more accidents from Riegel to Dixie."



Eric Crump/H-F Chronicle  
One problem spot on 183rd Street, according to the recent traffic study, is the intersection with Park Avenue, where a "no left turn" sign is often ignored by motorists.

Whether you're at one end or the other, the speed limit on 183rd is 30 mph through nearly all of Homewood, and Village Manager Napoleon Haney said the village has started a special police detail to specifically patrol for speeders.

After numerous resident complaints, Haney said village officials worked with Homewood Police Chief Denise McGrath to develop this traffic enforcement initiative.

"We added a special detail that patrols certain main streets during certain hours," Haney said. "Their task is to stop speeding in those corridors. All they do is drive up and down those streets with their radar guns on."

The extra detail, which started in mid-January, comes at additional cost to the village. Haney said it was necessary in the face of residents "saying loud and clear" that they wanted a solution to excessive speeding.

### At the Center Avenue intersection

The traffic study presents the village with several mitigations it could implement to make 183rd Street safer. At Center Avenue drivers see one of the village's already existing safety mitigations, plastic poles called lane delineators put in place to prevent left turns onto 183rd Street.

With its offset geometry, meaning its two ends don't meet up at an even intersection, Center Avenue presents a traffic challenge. Of the nearly 2-mile stretch examined in the traffic study, that intersection saw the most crashes with injuries; the report called it a "critical crash location."

In summer 2020, a 19-year-old Merrillville man was killed when his vehicle collided with another at 183rd and Center. The event enhanced public visibility of what many residents say is an ongoing safety issue.

While the lane delineators have been

effective, Schaefer said some drivers now go around them to turn left. This behavior creates a more dangerous situation and illustrates a major challenge for the village, he said.

"That's a big part of it: How do you change traffic behavior?" Schaefer said. "Changing traffic behavior can't always be done with physical structures."

The traffic study offers possible mitigations to reduce crashes at Center Avenue, which include adding a traffic signal, realigning the intersection, and installing a roundabout.

Village officials considering these mitigations have to analyze the potential impacts on roadways and residents, Schaefer said.

The timing of traffic signals on Halsted Street are coordinated with those on 183rd, a system that could be disrupted with a new traffic signal. The close proximity to the signal at Aberdeen Street could cause "stacking" of cars across intersections.

"Say it was decided at some point to put a roundabout at 183rd and Center," Schaefer said. "In order to do that, we have to get some property around there. So, is the village able to buy a home? Do they want to sell? Now you're uprooting people."

"There's a lot to it. Sometimes people think you can just (make a change like this), and you can't because there are other impacts to consider. How would it affect the neighborhood? Or even just a couple families?"

### Findings all along 183rd Street

Traffic volume on 183rd Street doesn't follow typical patterns, the study found. Instead of experiencing rush hour peaks in mornings and evenings, buffered by a midday lull, traffic builds gradually throughout the day, peaking in the evening.

Homes and businesses line Homewood's entire stretch of 183rd Street, and many side streets intersect with it.

