

How safe is it? Alton Police Chief Simmons answers questions about Clark Bridge

by Cory Davenport, Contributing Writer
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ALTON - In the last year, nearly 100 accidents have occurred near the Clark Bridge, and two of them were fatal.

The Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) defines the entrance and exit of the Clark Bridge as far west as Henry Street and as far east as the offices of Illinois American Water. Within that span of Alton, most of the accidents in question have occurred directly adjacent to the intersection of Landmarks and the Clark Bridge, which should be regulated by a triumvirate of stoplights. Somehow, however, those lights do not prevent the area's designation as one of the most common locations for traffic accidents in Alton.

Alton Police Chief Jason "Jake" Simmons said the bridge's amount of accidents is surpassed by busier parts of Alton, such as the many intersections of Homer Adams Parkway. He deemed the chief reason behind the sheer amount as a matter of common courtesy on the part of drivers.

"It's all about courtesy and waiting your turn, and a lot of people just don't want to do that," he said.

There were 94 accidents between Oct. 23, 2016, and Oct. 23, 2017, and 85 between the same dates from 2015 to 2016. Simmons said the cause behind the majority of those accidents were simply failure to yield to someone else's right-of-way.

Concern for this high-traffic and possibly dangerous area was renewed recently with talk of license-plate reading (LPR) cameras being installed on the bridge. Many people were concerned with the hypothetical measure's potential to be used to monitor traffic violations. While Simmons has emphatically stated numerous times over several different mediums this would never be the case, at a [Saturday morning meeting regarding the cameras](#), he did acknowledge the area was prone to accidents and needed to be made safer.

Currently, the Alton Police Department's traffic division is doing its best with three officers on duty, Simmons said. Most of their days are divided between traffic studies, honoring requests from alder-people and responding to accidents. The division formerly had a half dozen officers and were able to mount more traffic patrols.



"Issuing tickets to everyone may curb some of it, but ultimately it all comes down to common courtesy," Simmons said.

Recent accidents on the bridge, including a [fatal one involving a motorcyclist](#) and a [collision between a van and truck](#) in which a man had to be extracted by the Alton Fire Department and airlifted to a St. Louis hospital, were caused by failure to yield to someone else's right-of-way.

"It seems like people don't want to yield to oncoming traffic," Simmons said. "In that accident with the motorcyclist, it came down to a failure to yield. We're still investigating the car's black box on that one. That other serious accident in which the man needed to be extracted happened when the van refused to yield to the big truck's right-of-way."

Some people have commented to both Riverbender.com and the Alton Police Department the stoplights near the bridge are not functioning properly, and the timing of the switching is inaccurate and possibly dangerous. Simmons said IDOT addressed those concerns as recently as a few weeks ago.

"IDOT came out recently and actually did a study on the lights," he said. "They are working perfectly, and the timing is just fine. People are just not being courteous with their other drivers."

After more officers have been trained and added to the traffic division, Simmons said more patrols may be added to that area, but also stated many officers are called to school zones during the morning and afternoon rushes to ensure safety of children from speeders, reckless drivers and people driving distracted on their cellular phones.

Ultimately, the ability to make the area around the Clark Bridge safer is the responsibility of motorists. Simmons said people should yield to the rights-of-way of others and pay attention to both traffic lights and the actions of other drivers.

Jurisdiction of the bridge is in the hands of the Alton Police Department until the Missouri State Line, where it is under the control of the Missouri Highway Patrol. On the Missouri side of the bridge on Highway 367, the St. Charles County Police Department has jurisdiction.

Mutual aid agreements do exist between Alton and West Alton, however. Due to the volunteer nature of West Alton's fire department, paramedics from Alton are often able to reply sooner to incidents on the other side of the bridge. The Alton Police Department also helps St. Charles County in a similar fashion.