

VIEWPOINTS

U.S. 277 wasn't broke, TxDOT 'fixed' it for the worse

U.S. Highway 277 is part of the Ports to Plains Corridor for free trade between Mexico, the U.S. and Canada. This important roadway also is a direct commute to San Angelo from Christoval and a link to Interstate 10 in Sonora.

The road had been repaved by Reece Albert in 2007 and was still a quiet, smooth highway in very good shape.

However, in 2014 a \$55-million Texas Department of Transportation project (our tax dollars) added 25 miles of passing lanes along the 60-mile route from Sonora to San Angelo. Again Reece Albert performed the work. After several months and some section re-dos, the roadway was completed. Or so it appeared.

Reece Albert's work produced a smooth, quiet, quality pavement. But

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along comes San Angelo TxDOT and Blacktopper Technology of Blanco repaving the entire 14-mile stretch from Christoval to San Angelo.

The new pavement — applied in August 2014 — is a substandard blend of rock, rubber and blacktop. This pavement might be suited for driveways or a lightly traveled country lane, but not for a major highway.

As a professional driver, I have driven more than 1 million miles. This is the loudest newly paved road I've ever seen. You can't hear the radio or have a normal conversation. Seriously.

In September I complained about the

extremely noisy road to Tom Green County Judge Steve Floyd, state Rep. Drew Darby and a TxDOT engineer, who assured me the road was "top quality" and would "quiet down" after two months of traffic. San Angelo TxDOT repaved the road because of possible cracks in its foundation. They wanted to be "good stewards" of the taxpayers' money. I also was told to call back in two months if the road was still noisy.

Despite being only four months old, the new "top quality" road surface is already falling apart. The rocks in the deteriorating pavement come loose and become small missiles launched at motorists' vehicles.

Almost everyone who regularly travels this road is now sustaining damage to their cars and trucks.

One man received multiple dings and two windshield cracks. A woman received a huge crack right in the driver's line of vision. Both wrote letters to the editor published in the Standard-Times.

My neighbor's brand new pickup sustained a windshield crack. My car suffered multiple paint chips and a triple-chip gouge in the hood. My wife's car also is assaulted by multiple chips knocked out of the paint.

In December I again called Darby and San Angelo TxDOT. The engineer who had told me to "call back in two months" had retired Nov. 1. Not funny.

I did speak to another engineer who had received numerous complaints and agreed that the road was excessively noisy, falling apart and damaging vehicles. Yet

TxDOT needs to apologize and pay for our damaged vehicles. Furthermore, this and any other inferior pavement products need to be banned from further use by TxDOT.

Highway 277 needs to be completely repaved — edge to edge and everywhere the inferior blacktop was applied.

Wall, along Highway 87, received road construction in 2014. That new pavement is smooth as glass, quiet as a mouse — top-quality blacktop. There appears to be no deterioration or problems damaging vehicles.

Texans voted for more than \$1.7 billion in new highway money in November. To repave 277 with quality, quiet pavement will cost about \$3 million, according to one of the engineers.

I requested that he, Darby and other officials requisition the funds immediately. They need to prove to taxpayers they can be good stewards of our money by reconstructing Highway 277 into the quality road it previously was.

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