

Holiday weekend apt to see fewer drivers

Steve Reeves (Staff Writer)

TUSCALOOSA | AAA predicts fewer drivers will be on the roads over the Thanksgiving holiday for the first time in six years.

About 41 million people will travel 50 miles or more during the Thanksgiving holiday, according to the auto club. That's 600,000, or 1.4 percent, less than last year's total of 41.6 million.

Still, it will be busy enough that motorists can't afford to drop their guard. The holiday is one of the most hazardous travel periods each year.

"The average person out there on the roads won't be able to see a decrease," said Clay Ingram of AAA Alabama. "It's still going to be very congested on the roads."

Ingram said travelers in the Southeast will see the highest congestion, whether they're traveling by automobile or plane.

"The Southeast is always one of the busiest regions," Ingram said.

AAA projects 8.8 million people will travel by auto in the Southeast. That's compared with 6.5 million in the Midwest and 4.8 million in the Northeast.

About 1.76 million people will travel by air in the Southeast, followed by 1.72 million in the West and 882,000 in the Northeast.

Ingram said fast-dropping gas prices certainly haven't dampened people's enthusiasm for holiday travel.

The average price for a gallon of gas in Alabama is hovering right around \$2 a gallon and is expected to soon drop even further.

"We're right at halfway where we were two months ago when it comes to gas prices," Ingram said. "That's just unbelievable."

According to a University of Alabama study, the long Thanksgiving weekend can be a hazardous time to be on the road, especially during bad weather, as was the case for much of the state during last year's Thanksgiving holiday.

"This is definitely a time to be avoided, on the Wednesday before Thanksgiving, especially if bad weather is a possibility," Allen Parrish, professor of computer science and director of the CARE Research and Development Laboratory at UA, said in a statement. "There is obviously a

large concentration of people on the road who are not nearly as familiar with their routes as commuters.”

There were 585 crashes in Alabama on the Wednesday before Thanksgiving in 2007, compared with 196 crashes occurring on the Thanksgiving holiday itself, according to the CARE study.

The CARE study indicated that the best day of the week to be on the road is Thanksgiving Day. The actual holiday had about one-third the number of crashes that occurred on Wednesday, indicating that most motorists had reached their destination by that point.