Monday crashes a sign of things to come?

By Doug Murphy
Staff Writer

Freeway traffic was diverted onto Ahwatukee Foothills surface streets after a fatal accident Monday afternoon.

Interstate 10 westbound was closed at Pecos Road after Jason Relkin, 29, of Mesa died when his pickup rear-ended a semi truck around 3:30 p.m.

The crash occurred just as firefighters were cleaning up a rollover crash on westbound I-10 near Warner Road that left one woman dead and four in serious condition.

Officials did not know if the Warner Road rollover, which created traffic jams in both directions, contributed to Relkin rear-ending the semi.

All westbound traffic was diverted off the freeway and onto the Loop 202 or Pecos Road, resulting in heavy traffic on surface streets until 6 p.m. when the detour was removed.

For one Ahwatukee Foothills man, it was a sign of things to come if the South Mountain Loop 202 freeway were built.

Terry Wayne said that semi trucks jammed 40th Street and Chandler Boulevard after I-10 was closed.

"Monday there were a multitude of trucks running up and down the street, which we don't normally see," said Wayne, who lives near 40th Street and Chandler Boulevard.

He wasn't upset at the freeway being closed for a fatal accident, but wondered what would happen if a similar

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accident occurred on the South Mountain Loop 202 and traffic had to be diverted onto surface streets.

Once before, Ahwatukee Foothills was the scene of massive gridlock as traffic was diverted off I-10.

On May 21, 1998 westbound I-10 was closed at Elliot Road when a dead body was discovered near the Guadalupe Road bridge.

The freeway was closed for seven hours, from 3 to 10 a.m., resulting in gridlock, as traffic was detoured off the freeway and onto surface streets.

Traffic that turned east found several alternative routes to get to Baseline Road and back onto the freeway, but motorists that turned west, simply added to the gridlock on the Warner–Elliot Loop and on Ray Road and 48th Street, looking for a way out of the Ahwatukee Foothills, sometimes called the world's largest cul-de-sac.

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