

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD
WASHINGTON, D.C.

ISSUED: January 25, 1980

Forwarded to:

Honorable Robert J. McGuire
Police Commissioner, New York City
Police Department
1 Police Plaza
New York, New York 10013

SAFETY RECOMMENDATION(S)

H-79-52

About 11:05 p.m., June 8, 1979, a Buick sedan, with eight occupants, was westbound on the Grand Central Parkway in New York City. The Buick, while in the acceleration lane of the 188th Street westbound, parkway entrance ramp, passed another westbound vehicle at a high rate of speed. Upon re-entering the parkway through lanes, the Buick veered out of control to the left, vaulted the median guardrail, and collided with three eastbound passenger cars. Two passengers in the Buick and the drivers of two eastbound cars were killed; 10 persons were injured. 1/

During the investigation of this accident, the Safety Board contacted the New York State and New York City Departments of Transportation (DOT), the division office of the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), and the New York City Police Department (NYCPD) to determine the number of crossover accidents in the vicinity of the crash.

Officials of the New York State and City DOT indicated that computerized accident data were not available for any location within New York City subsequent to 1976. New York City DOT did supply a computer printout of accidents that occurred on the parkway from 1973 through 1976 from data obtained from computer tapes supplied by the Aided and Accident Section of the NYCPD.

The division office of the FHWA supplied a computer printout of accidents that occurred from 1975 to June 1979, on a 4-mile segment of the parkway that includes the crash site. FHWA obtained the printout from the New York State Department of Motor Vehicles (NYSDMV), but it was incomplete because it did not include property damage accidents.

1/ For more detailed information read, "Multiple Vehicle Median Barrier Crossover and Collision, Grand Central Parkway, New York, New York, June 8, 1979."
(NTSB-HAR-79-8)

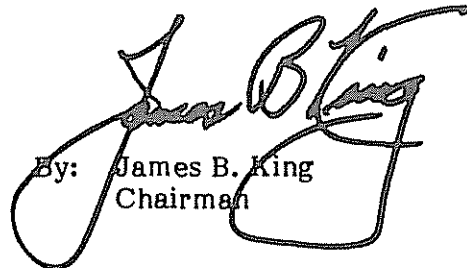
Presently, the sole source of New York City accident data is the Aided and Accident Section of the NYCPD, which processes between 150,000 and 160,000 accident reports annually. Data from these reports are stored on computer tapes which are distributed to New York State and City DOT. Inquiries made at the Aided and Accident Section in August 1979 revealed that the latest tapes available were 1976 and at that time the section was processing 1978 and 1979 accident reports. Processing of 1977 accident reports was being deferred until such time as the section "caught up" with current 1979 cases. The backlog of cases was attributed to a lack of sufficient resources to process the accident reports.

Locations with sharply increasing accident histories cannot be identified in a timely manner with data that is 2 1/2 years old. The current backlog denies management any knowledge of the severity and frequency of recent accidents associated with the design deficiencies of the median barrier. Further, the computerized accident records system currently being established by the NYS DOT is not scheduled to be fully implemented until October 1980 or sometime in 1981. Also, this system will include only those accidents that occur after the system is activated. Therefore, there is an urgent need for the NYCPD and NYS DOT to cooperate to update the accident records' system and reduce the existing backlog.

Since the Aided and Accident Section is currently the sole source of complete traffic accident data, and as a result of this accident investigation, the National Transportation Safety Board recommends to the Police Commissioner of the City of New York that:

Until such time that New York State implements a centralized accident records system, provide necessary resources so that current accident data in New York City will be available to highway transportation officials. (Class II, Priority Action) (H-79-52)

KING, Chairman, DRIVER, Vice Chairman, McADAMS, GOLDMAN, and BURSLEY, Members, concurred in the above recommendation.


By: James B. King
Chairman