

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD
WASHINGTON, D.C.

ISSUED: January 23, 1980

Forwarded to:

Honorable Anthony Ameruso
Commissioner
New York City Department of Transportation
40 Worth Street
New York, New York 10013

SAFETY RECOMMENDATION(S)

H-79-49

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/

The accident site was a six-lane divided highway with a 50-mph speed limit. The opposing lanes were separated by a 10-foot raised grass median that was bordered by an 8-inch barrier-type concrete curbing. A median barrier system of weak post, W-beam guardrail was installed on the top and in the center of the median 4 1/2 feet from the curb face. At the time of the accident, the median was heavily overgrown with vegetation that exceeded the height of the guardrail; the vegetation has since been cut down. The design height of the guardrail was 27 inches, but due to a 4- to 6-inch excess accumulation of soil on the median, the height of the guardrail was reduced to 21 to 23 inches.

The American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials, "Guide for Selecting, Locating and Designing Traffic Barriers" states, "In some cases, the effective rail height will be decreased due to an accumulation of dirt, pavement overlays, etc. Of course dirt should be removed, if feasible, to return the barrier to its correct height."

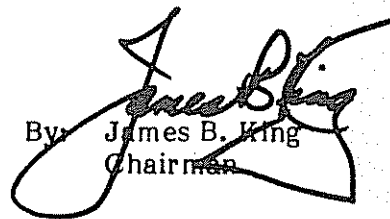
1/ For more detailed information read, "Multiple Vehicle Median Barrier Crossover and Collision, Grand Central Parkway, New York, New York, June 8, 1979." (NTSB-HAR-79-8)

The Safety Board's investigation revealed that the median barrier did not conform to present design standards, and therefore, a recommendation was made to the New York State Department of Transportation to replace it with an operational system that conforms to current standards.

However, the National Transportation Safety Board recommends that the New York City Department of Transportation:

As an interim measure, remove soil buildup from the median on the Grand Central Parkway and from similar locations in the City where an accumulation of soil has reduced the effective height of the guardrail.
(Class II, Priority Action) (H-79-49)

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


By: James B. King
Chairman