

H-714

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD
WASHINGTON, D.C.

ISSUED: January 25, 1980

Forwarded to:

Honorable Joan Claybrook
Administrator
National Highway Traffic Safety
Administration
Washington, D.C. 20590

SAFETY RECOMMENDATION(S)

H-79-51

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 crash, Safety Board investigators 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)

During the investigation, the Safety Board learned that currently the sole source of complete 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.

There are two National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) Highway Safety Program Standards that are relevant to this situation: Highway Safety Program Standard (HSPS) No. 9 — Identification and Surveillance of Accident Locations, and Highway Safety Program Standard (HSPS) No. 10 — Traffic Records. HSPS No. 9 requires that each State, in cooperation with county and local governments, shall have a program for identifying accident locations and for maintaining surveillance of those locations having high accident rates or losses. HSPS No. 10 states that each State, in cooperation with its political subdivisions, shall maintain a statewide traffic records system which shall include data regarding drivers, vehicles, accidents, and highways and which shall be compatible for the purposes of analysis and correlation. Systems maintained by local governments shall be compatible with and capable of furnishing data to the State system.

Both Standards call for a periodic evaluation by the State with an evaluation summary to the FHWA (HSPS No. 9) and NHTSA (HSPS No. 10). In compliance with HSPS No. 10, the NYS DOT issued a 1978 Annual Evaluation Report — Highway Safety Improvement Program which stated:

"It (the report) documents New York's most recent efforts in minimizing the part the highway facility plays in accident causation and severity... Problem identification is one of the best developed aspects of New York's HSIP (highway safety improvement program). Our accident surveillance system pinpoints suspect locations according to recorded accident histories."

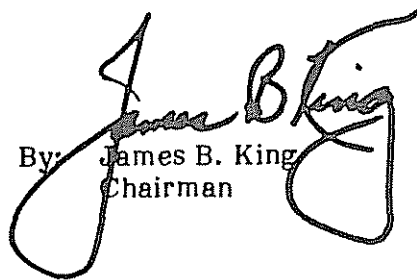
Although the NYS DOT Annual Evaluation Report to NHTSA states that there is a statewide operational system on both State and local highways with respect to HSPS No. 9 — Identification and Surveillance of Accident Locations, the Safety Board's investigation indicated that the program is not current in New York City. If the New York State accident records system had been functioning properly - as indicated in the Annual Report and as required by HSPS Nos. 9 and 10 - New York City probably would have been alerted to the accident prone area and the need for corrective action.

Since over \$13 million in Federal funds has already been spent during the past 12 years in the development of the New York traffic records system, the NHTSA should oversee the improvement of the records systems. Furthermore, the NHTSA should investigate New York State's implementation of HSPS No. 10, particularly with regard to New York City.

Therefore, the National Transportation Safety Board recommends that the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration:

Investigate the level of implementation by New York State of Highway Safety Program Standard 10 (Traffic Records) particularly with regard to New York City. (Class II, Priority Action) (H-79-51)

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


By: James B. King
Chairman

