

Narrow Head-On Impact Results In Fatality on Plank Line (Highway 19) North of Tillsonburg Ontario

Posting Date: 20 Feb 2012

29-year-old Jason Howe of Mount Elgin was killed February 15th, 2012 following a head-on collision that occurred on Plank Line (formerly Highway 19), just north of Airport Road, north of Tillsonburg, Ontario. It was reported that Howe was driving a cube van that struck a tractor-trailer. Details of the collision were never released however our examination of the site provides some additional facts.

The Transport truck was still at the collision site in the late afternoon of February 15th and damage to the left side of the tractor and trailer were noted. Below is a view of the Tractor.



The direct contact damage is evident at its left -front corner and it progresses rearward toward the trailer. The left drive wheels sustained heavy damage as shown below.



There was also damage evident to the front corner of the trailer as noted below.



The damage also extended toward the rear of the left side of the trailer, as noted below.



The Cube van was already removed from the site and damage to it was not able to be seen.

The damage on the Doug Coleman truck would occur from a narrow frontal impact involving the left portions of both vehicles. Such an impact would cause both vehicles to pass by each other and come to rest on opposite sides of the area of impact. This is evident when we examine the physical evidence at the site.

The photo at the top of the following page shows a view, looking south in the southbound lane of Plank Line, just a few hundred metres north of Airport Road. So this view is looking toward the Town of Tillsonburg. In the foreground you should recognize a number of markings in the southbound lane. In particular you should recognize the white-coloured markings which are indicative of recent gouging of the pavement as a result of the impact. These gouges exist in the southbound lane consistent with the location of the Doug Coleman truck which was likely travelling southbound. It would appear that the northbound Howe Cube van travelled into the southbound lane where the impact occurred. Due to the much larger mass of the Coleman truck it travelled further for some distance before coming to rest on the east roadside just north of the area of our parked car in the background.



The photo below shows a view looking northbound in the northbound lane where the gouges are just behind the camera. The darker fluid stains indicate the Cube van's travel to final rest onto the east shoulder.



Below is a view looking southward toward the final rest position of the Coleman truck in the east ditch. Due to the damage caused at the left wheels of the vehicle this caused greater drag to the left of its centre of gravity and this is what caused the vehicle to be dragged toward the left (east) following the impact. Such a motion is sometimes confused by investigators as an indication that the truck driver steered toward the east but that is generally not the case.



In trying to understand why the Howe Cube van travelled into the opposing lane we would want to make a close study of the northbound lane in the vicinity shown in the above photo. Sometimes a pavement edge drop off is a common culprit but we can see in the photo that there is not significant edge drop off. The white, painted edge line of the lane is also located a substantial distance from the actual pavement edge so this is also a good safety factor.

Curiously, at the time of our arrival at the site the gravel of the shoulder had been freshly graded just in the area where one would want to evaluate the characteristics of the east shoulder for evidence of a cause for the Cube van's pre-crash action. It is unknown whether this grading of the shoulder occurred before or after the impact but it would be a curious fact regardless of the timing.

The photo below shows a view looking south-east, toward the final rest position of the Coleman truck. Curiously, there was a broken branch lying amongst the debris at the truck's rest location as shown in the bottom photo of this page.



A view of the end of the branch suggests that the breakage occurred recently as shown in the photo below.



We checked the condition of the tree at the final rest position of the truck and confirmed that the branch did not come from any breakage on that tree. Our scan of the vicinity around the accident site also indicated that there were no trees close enough to the road to explain how the branch could have been deposited at this location.

These are curious findings that cannot be explained from just examining the post-impact evidence at a collision site. Events occur, or evidence is created after the impact that may have nothing to do with the cause of a collision and it requires a full examination of all the available evidence before conclusions can be drawn.

It remains a mystery why the Howe Cube Van crossed the centre-line of the road. The police have not provided any further comment but requests for witnesses have been sent out. This is not uncommon as the cause of a collision like this is often not revealed in the physical evidence at the site or in the damage of the vehicles.

Gorski Consulting
London, Ontario, Canada