

Collision at Queens Ave and Ontario St, London - Why Should We Be Surprised?

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The London Free Press had made it appear that there is a genuine mystery why more collisions are occurring at the intersection of Queens Avenue (an east/west, one way arterial) and Ontario Street (a north-south, two-way collector street). To me there is little mystery.

Queens Avenue has historically been used by Londoners to get a quick entrance into downtown London. In fact, I can remember as a school boy in the early 1960s, at the intersection of Queens & English (one block west of the present site) when we observed a primitive police radar unit composed of graph paper rolling on a cylinder and the jumping of needle marking out the outline of speed of on-coming vehicles. High tech stuff but even back then there was a concern over speed of vehicles on Queens Ave especially because some many of us school kids were crossing that roadway to and from school.

But recently the two westbound lanes of Queens have been reduced to one lane on its south side while the north lane has been transformed to on-street parking and a bicycle lane. It would seem that this was a smart idea at the time because we were promoting the idea that more Londoners should take up a more environmentally friendly method of transportation. Unfortunately, whenever you take two lanes of traffic and reduce them to one lane of traffic this compression of the traffic units means that there are less gaps in that traffic.

Let me say that again so you understand. Imagine within a one-block distance there are 10 westbound vehicles in both lanes. But because there are two lanes there is an opportunity for some of these vehicles to travel side-by-side so that there are more gaps of traffic within the block. But when you take away one of those lanes then all 10 vehicles must fit into that one lane and they can no longer drive side-by-side and so gaps in traffic are reduced, and you tend to have less opportunity for cross traffic to find gaps to pass through this main road.

Next, you introduce on-street parking. Convenient but it also acts as blockage to visibility. Now, driver attempting to cross Queens Ave have less visibility as well as less gaps.

Now a third complication. With the addition of on-street parking the snow plows must remove the snow from the areas where the vehicles must park. But near intersections the parking zones are removed and the curb narrows to the single lane condition. A snow plow sees this additional space of boulevard as a convenient place to stack up the

snow that is removed from the parking lane. So now you have higher snow banks close to the area of an intersection.

So we combine the effects: less gaps in traffic, less visibility due to on-street parking and less visibility due to tall snow banks. What do you think is going to happen? The photo below was taken by me on January 25th, 2011, or a day after a collision was reported at the intersection of Queens and Ontario. This view is taken from my driver's seat as I am driving west on Queens and approaching the intersection at Ontario. The yellow house on the right side of the road is at the north-west corner of the intersection. This house was the one where one of the vehicles came to rest and nearly knocked out a gas line - could have been an interesting explosion.



What I want you to focus on in this photo is the three problems I mentioned above. Note there is only one lane and the gap between my vehicle and the vehicle ahead is enticing to a driver who might consider crossing. So if you leave such an enticing gap between yourself and the vehicle ahead are you not part of the problem? Did anyone say to you in a driver education class that the manner of gap you leave between yourself and the vehicle ahead will dictate whether you will be involved in a collision? I heard drivers say to me all the time "Everybody keeps entering the road into my path and I have to take emergency action to avoid a collision". Well let me tell you - you are the primary problem because you do not understand that you are creating a problem by how you

are positioning your vehicle. Either close-up the gap or leave sufficient room so someone can make a safe crossing or enter the road safely.

Next, I want you to recognize to position of the parked van in the parking lane on the right side of the road next to my vehicle. This is a tall vehicle. A driver on the crossroad at Ontario Street cannot see past this Van and would not be able to see my vehicle until my vehicle cleared the van. Considering a perception/response delay of perhaps 2 seconds and an additional 5 second to clear the intersection, it might take a total of 7 seconds that the crossing driver might need to safely make is crossing. But If I'm flying along at 70 km/h or almost 20 metres per second then I can travel about 140 metres in that 7 seconds. Now, look at the photo, am I about 140 metres from the yellow house at the intersection? Could be. So why would we be surprised at a collision would occur?

Finally I want you to focus on the height of the snow banks. These are not the highest they have ever been this winter. If we recall the London area in December we can recall that there were snow banks up to two metres high due to the tremendous amount of snow fall. But there has not been any large snowfall in the area for several weeks now. So this is not an unusual situation at this intersection. How much of a vehicle would you likely see if it was stopped on Ontario St near that yellow house in the above photo? I can tell you that a typical car is about 145 centimetres tall and a typical driver's eye height is about 120 centimetres above the road surface. So is there going to be a problem? Yes.

I think we should stop being mystified and more attention should be paid to inform drivers of the dangers that lurk out there. Unfortunately this is not done by any news media nor any other official agency. Police can make various statements about people's bad driving but it will not help if there is a lack of education and a lack of understanding of what some of the problems might be.