

# Irony of Selective Road Safety Enforcement

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While travelling to review of the evidence of recently-occurring serious collisions in the area of London, Ontario, Canada, we were caught by the irony of the selective methods of road safety enforcement in our area. This began during our southward travel on Veterans Memorial Parkway in London when we came across an obvious roadside problem. It was so obvious that we could see it from a sufficient distance to be able to photograph it with our dash-mounted camera before we passed by at highway speed. That photo is shown below.



**Figure 1:** View, looking southbound on Veterans Memorial Parkway in London, Ontario showing an unmistakable, large crevice in the gravel of the centre median.

Someone familiar with searching for roadway problems would not mistaken the evidence on the left edge of the pavement, in the median, which indicated a deep drop-off of the gravel. So how could this evidence not be detected by anyone responsible for the safety of the travelling public?

After conducting our intended work we returned to problem on Veterans Memorial Parkway. Taking a carpenter's level, a tape measure and some tape we crossed to the centre median to take some photos of the problem. It became more ironic as we gazed across to the west roadside where we recognized one of the large monuments that had been placed along this highway to commemorate the lives of those who served the country of Canada in war. The word "Courage" was largely displayed across from this large elephant pit that we were trying to document.



Figure 2: View of apparatus used to document the extent of the crevice in the gravel shoulder at pavement edge of the centre-median while the "Courage" monument is visible in the background.

As shown in Figures 3 and 4 this crevice was over 10 inches deep and it extended for several metres along the asphalt edge.

But this action also caught our attention as we had a feeling that we had been here before. Yes, on September 2, 2011, we documented a very similar set of evidence as shown in Figures 5 and 6. At that time the problem was apparently recognized by someone because a large traffic cone had been placed at the crevice, only to be partially swallowed up by it. The further irony is what we found at the base of the traffic cone, as shown in Figures 7 - a "funeral" marker likely lost by some passing motorcade.



Figure 3: Crevice depth of April 26, 2013 was over 10 inches.



Figure 4: Crevice extending along pavement edge of southbound lanes at centre median on April 26, 2013



Figure 5: Crevice at same location photographed on September 2, 2011.



Figure 6: Crevice at same location photographed on September 2, 2011.



Figure 7: "Funeral" badge found lying in crevice of gravel shoulder on September 2, 2011.

Courage can mean many things in many circumstances.



Figure 8: "Courage" monument as photographed on September 2, 2011.

We also recalled what diligence was taken by repair crews when we observed them on August 20, 2012, as shown in Figures 9 and 10 below. The deterioration of the pavement was prevented by cutting into it and applying a rubberized asphalt sealer to fill in any possible cracks.



Figure 9: View of work crew operating in the southbound lanes of the Veterans Memorial Parkway.



Figure 10: View of worker cutting into the pavement of the southbound lanes of Veterans Memorial Parkway on August 20, 2012.

The result of those efforts was what was visible to us on April 26, 2013 as we surveyed the surface of the southbound lanes as shown in Figure 11.



Figure 11: Northbound view along the southbound lanes of Veterans Memorial Parkway, near the location of the deep crevice, showing the fine patching of the pavement that had been completed in August of 2012.

While continuing our documentations we happened to glance along this highway further to the north as we saw some flashing lights. As shown in Figure 12 we observed that a London Police Force cruiser was parked on the shoulder behind another vehicle and we recognized that this was a typical traffic stop.

Little do we recognize how this simple act also takes courage. The officer never knows who he or she will meet on such an occasion. It is often a routine act but in rare instances it could be life-threatening. The threat is obviously from the possibility of encountering a dangerous criminal, but that is not the only threat. Police who pull over on the shoulder of a high speed highway continually risk their lives because of the frequent incidents where their vehicle is impacted by vehicles that stray off the pavement. This is particularly dangerous when the impact is by a large and heavy transport truck. In the vicinity of London, Ontario freeways such as Highway 401 can contain over 50% of its volume made up of these large heavy vehicles.



Figure 12: Zoomed in view of London Police cruiser making a traffic stop on the shoulder of the southbound lanes of the Veterans Memorial Parkway on April 26, 2013.

So we were further impressed with the diligence of this officer when we completed our site review and began travelling northbound on Veterans Memorial Parkway only to find that he had stopped yet another vehicle only a kilometre or two away from the previous stop, as shown in Figures 13 and 14. This is a testament to the courage of this officer, risking his life, both from the dangerous people he may encounter, but also from being impacted by distracted drivers.

And it is important to understand that those emergency lights flashing around his vehicle are both attracting and distracting. For the number of times we may complain about drivers "rubber-necking" and not giving police the extra room by steering into a distant lane, the simple fact remains that a traffic stop is attracting and distracting, and it will always be so as long we humans are in control of the driving.

In some instances a passing vehicle need not stray into the stopped cruiser as some police officers actually park their cruisers partly onto the paved lane - a very very dangerous act. For example this is the very thing we observed on the Veterans Memorial Parkway on July 23, 2012 as shown in Figures 15 and 16.



Figure 13: View of large truck moving over to the clear lane while passing the police cruiser making a traffic stop on the northbound lanes of the Veterans Memorial Parkway on April 26, 2013.



Figure 14: View of courageous police officer, standing outside of his cruiser near the northbound lanes of the Veterans Memorial Parkway on April 26, 2013.



Figure 15: View, looking northbound on Veterans Memorial Parkway showing a London City Police cruiser positioned dangerously in the live curb lane of Veterans Memorial Parkway to perform a traffic stop.



Figure 16: View of police cruiser stopped in a live lane of Veterans Memorial Parkway on July 23, 2012.

Returning to our observations of April 26th, 2013, on the previous evening of April 25, 2013 we had attended the site of a transport truck rollover on the westbound entrance ramp from Highbury Avenue to Highway 401. We had taken on-site photos of the rescue efforts from that evening as shown in Figures 17 and 18.



Figure 17: View, looking east toward the westbound entrance ramp to Hwy 401 from Highbury Ave where a Tractor trailer rolled over at approximately 1830 hours on April 25, 2013.

The driver of this transport truck reportedly sustained injuries but these were not serious. But the scenario could have been much worse. The truck cab was crushed above the driver and these drivers are more likely to be unrestrained in the mistaken belief that the mass of their trucks would prevent the large velocity changes that are experienced by smaller vehicles. Without wearing a seatbelt this driver could have been in a precarious situation, and even if he was restrained the collapse of the cab roof could have made the consequences unpredictable.

The typical scenario in such cases is that the driver of the rig travels too fast for "the" road conditions. But the road conditions changed rapidly as we know that a sudden downpour passed through the site at the time of the crash. So as we have said so many times before, there is no such thing as "the" road conditions, but that the road conditions often change and violate a driver's expectations.

So we re-attended this site on the morning of April 26th to evaluate what might have contributed to the consequences.

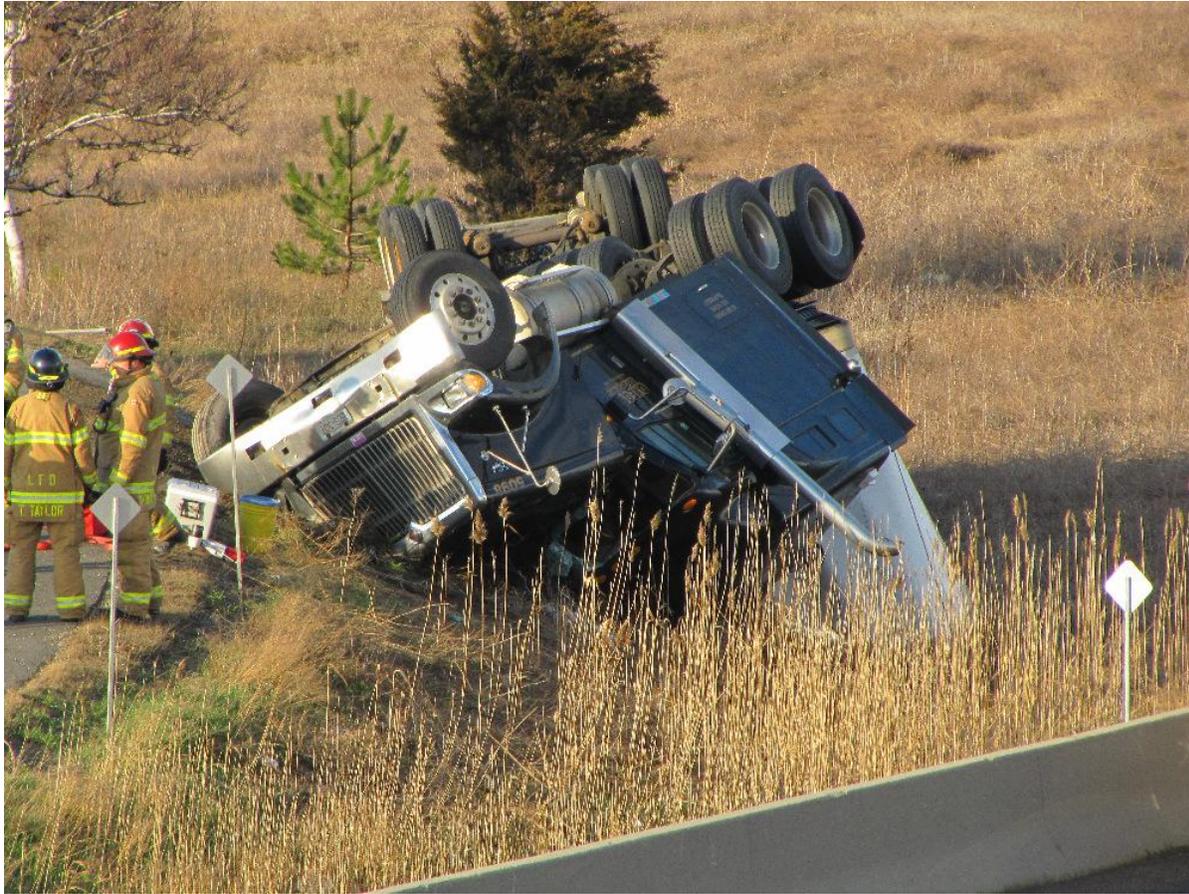


Figure 18: View of driver's side of cab of road tractor showing how it was crushed by the landing onto the bank of the entrance ramp.

Even on the evening of April 25th we observed that there was a guardrail on the outside of that ramp but it ended prior to the point of where the tractor trailer rolled over. Yet, from our vantage point, we could see that there was a drop from the outside of the ramp, along a steep slope, down to the roadside and any vehicle travelling off that road surface would be in danger of rolling over. In fact, the evidence indicated that the truck had barely managed to tip over as its final rest position was not very far from the initiation of the roll. The minimal extent of the roll was evident in that, even though it travelled over a steep bank, the truck only managed two, quarter rolls.

When we arrived at the accident site on the morning of April 26, 2013 the scenario was as shown in Figures 19 and 20. Figure 19 shows the start of the guardrail on the outside edge of the ramp and Figure 20 shows a distance further along the ramp toward the beginning of the collision evidence.



Figure 19: View of beginning of guardrail on entrance ramp to Westbound Hwy 401.



Figure 20: View looking further along outside guardrail of entrance ramp to westbound Hwy 401.

What we observed from examining the guardrail is what good condition it was in. No evidence of any previous impacts, not even any minor dents. That could be a good thing and it could also be bad. As we came to the end of the guardrail, as shown in Figure 21, we observed that the transport truck had not made any contact to it. In fact, several of the fragile, diamond shaped, curve-delineation, marker posts marking the outside of the ramp were still standing erect at the end of the rail as shown in Figures 22 and 23.



Figure 21: View of conditions at the end of the guardrail.

So the position where the transport truck left the ramp surface was well past the point where the outside guard rail came to an end. So what benefit did the guardrail provide to this driver?

In fact, we have argued that the height of such guardrails, and their strength, would provide very little benefit to re-directing a large truck like this. In fact, such a low rail would make matters worse as it would increase the likelihood that the truck would trip over this low obstacle. The truck driver might stand a better chance to just fall down an embankment and hope that the truck stays upright rather than accept the heightened chance of being tripped by such a low guard rail.



Figure 22: View at end of the guardrail showing the curve delineation posts that are still standing and indicating that the truck never passed over them.



Figure 23: View of the curve delineation posts that are still standing past the end of the guardrail.

So, we could argue that the guardrail was not there for the benefit of truck drivers even though they might represent over 50% of the traffic volume. So whom does the guardrail benefit? Perhaps drivers of smaller vehicles? Well, certainly the lower height and proportionately higher strength should benefit the "less than 50%" of these lucky drivers - but only if they are exiting the ramp where the guardrail exists - and that is not guaranteed. For example, while looking at the outside edge of ramp we discovered another older set of tire marks on the grass which were also past the end of the guardrail as shown in Figure 24.



Figure 24: View of older set of loss-of-control tire marks caused by a smaller vehicle, located just past the end of the guardrail.

To those unaccustomed to locating loss-of-control tire marks the view in Figure 24 might not demonstrate an obvious indication of where these tire marks exist. If we look at the curve-delineation post in the centre of Figure 24, there are two loss-of-control tire marks, one on each side of the post, which are noticeable from the "whiteness" of the underlying gravel where the grass has been torn away. This tire marks indicate the counter-clockwise rotation of a smaller vehicle that would be expected in such circumstances.

So we have a beautiful, unmarked guardrail but it fails to be contacted by the tractor trailer that rolled over, as well as by another smaller vehicle which also fell off the outside embankment past the guardrail.

So is the guardrail providing any benefit to smaller vehicles? We don't know. Those responsible for the upkeep of this ramp should maintain a history of all accident events so that they can properly address any safety problems. But you and I will never know details of these collision events unless we sue those persons and therefore request such secret data. But as these entities are in danger of losing a great deal of money if they lose a civil suit it is obvious that such data will otherwise never see the light of day.

But as general citizens with no stake in these games we must be interested in our general safety. While these legal games are being played the general public suffers because roadway problems are not sufficiently revealed.

A number of months ago (October, 2012) we posted an article to our website entitled "Loss-of-Control On Highway 401 Exit Ramp - A Lucky Result". This stemmed from our observation of collision evidence on the westbound exit ramp just east of Wellington Road in south London where we observed that a vehicle had crashed through a chain-link fence and came to rest in a pond. Since we did not hear any news about this incident we commented on the luck of the vehicle occupants in surviving a potentially fatal mishap. We have also recently highlighted the number of persons who have drowned in Ontario from exiting a number of roads, some with barrier protections and some not. So we came back to this site on April 18, 2013 because we observed that the fence damage was still unrepaired.



Figure 25: View From October, 2012 showing where a vehicle left the 401 exit ramp, crashed through a chain-link fence and fell into a pond.



Figure 26: View from October, 2012 where a vehicle crashed through this chain-link fence and came to rest in the pond in the background.

What we did not reveal in October, 2012 is where this site is located with respect to the London OPP Police detachment. So on April 18th, 2013 we took the photos shown in Figures 27 and 28.

Figure 27 shows that the fence still remains unrepaired. How many months is it from the day we observed the damage, not to mention the delay from the actual collision? The irony reveals itself when we turn around and take a photo (Figure 28) from a slightly different angle, toward the northeast, with the accident site in the foreground and the London OPP Detachment building only a hundred metres away in the background.

To us this is an important matter. We understand that the duties of police are many and complicated. Some involve more immediate dangers than what we see here. But there is a pattern. The deep crevice that we discussed at the beginning of this article has been ignored. The lack of performance of the guard-rail on the Hwy 401 entrance ramp will likely never be documented in the subsequent police report. And now we have shown how another danger that has resulted in numerous recent drownings in Ontario is being ignored under the very nose of the OPP Detachment.



Figure 27: View of (still) unrepaired fence on April 18, 2013.

We know from personal experience that police are informed that the documentation of roadway safety problems is not their responsibility. The municipalities and the Ontario Ministry of Transportation will handle these matters. But when these municipalities and the Ministry of Transportation are the very persons who are protecting themselves from being sued how can we reasonably expect that their improper actions will be revealed by them? Does this make any reasonable sense?

The irony is that police should exist to protect the public. This should not be just from criminals but from all possible dangers that they are aware of. It should not matter whether a defenceless child is in jeopardy of being killed by a crazed gunman or by a roadway defect. Death is still death, and it hurts no less it occurred from a different mechanism. When police recognize a threat they should take appropriate actions. At times when the danger is immediate then "bring out the marines", the swat team, or whatever. But when the danger is passive, such as a roadway safety problem, then, at least, the problem should be documented and if it cannot be repaired immediately then its presence should be made known to the public. Surely this should be a reasonable expectation.



Figure 28: View of London OPP Detachment building in the background of an accident site where the chain link fence has been left unrepaired for months following a collision where the vehicle travelled into the pond in the foreground.

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