

# Gorski Consulting Website

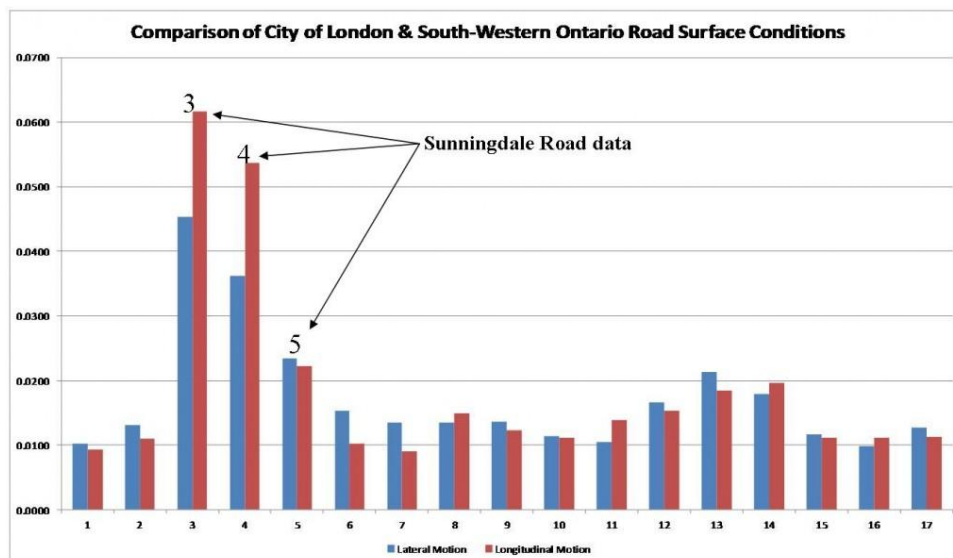
## Archived News - 2014 - February

February 28, 2014

### Preliminary Comparison of City of London and South-Western Ontario Road Surface Conditions

Gorski Consulting continues its series of reports on our testing of road surface conditions in the vicinity of the City of London, Ontario and throughout South-Western Ontario. In this latest article we report on the conditions of 12 additional sites, located primarily to the south west of London. This additional data is compared to the data that has been previously reported in our earlier article “iPhone Gyro Function Generates Detailed Data Of Road Conditions For Accident Analysis” that can be found on this webpage. The combined data provides some dramatic information about how some sites in the region contain unusual, substandard and possibly unsafe conditions.

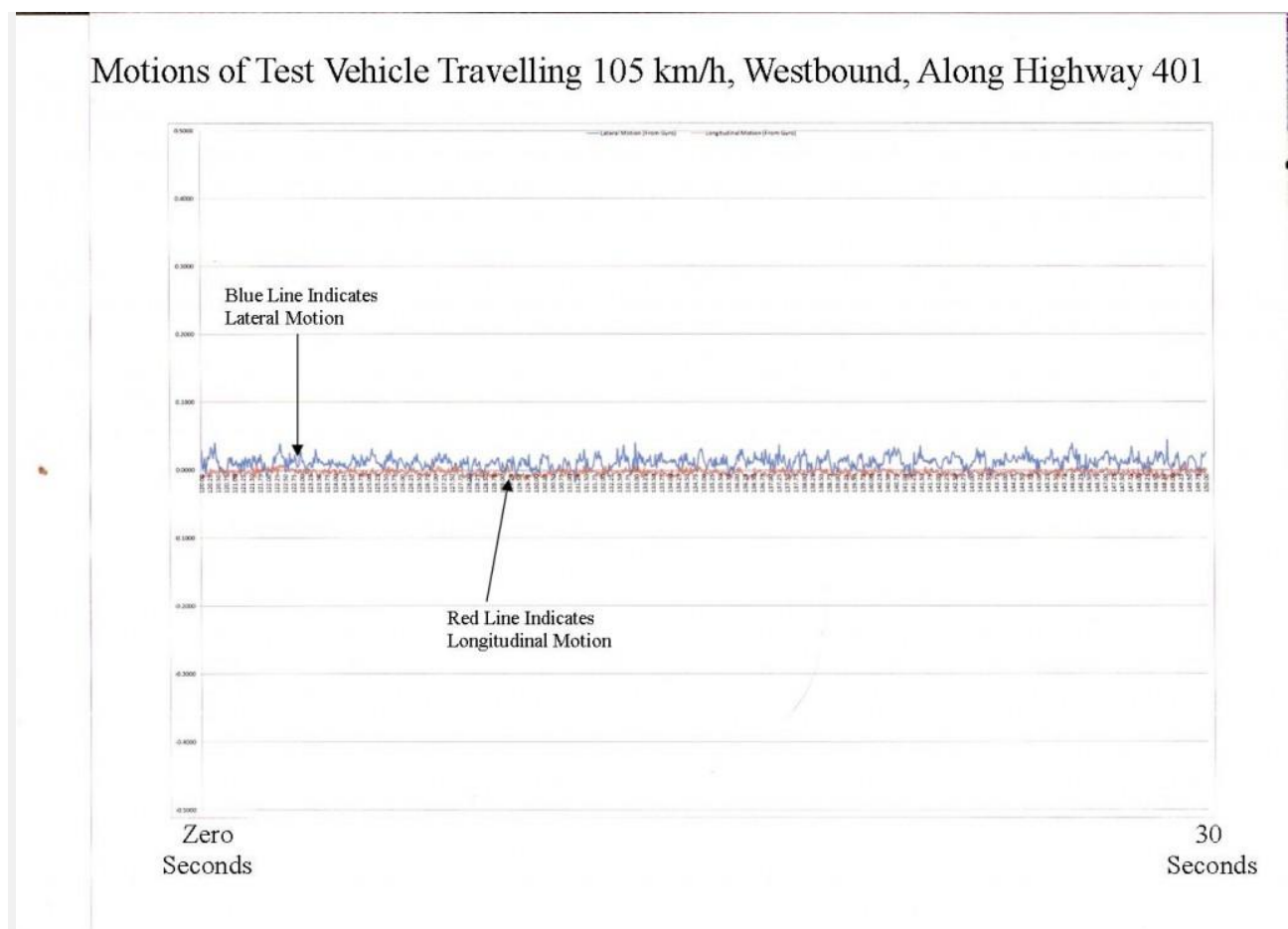
As an example, the chart below is taken from our article and demonstrates that Sunningdale Road, in the north-east corner of London, Ontario causes excessive lateral and longitudinal motions of a test vehicle that are far greater than any of the other sites that were tested.



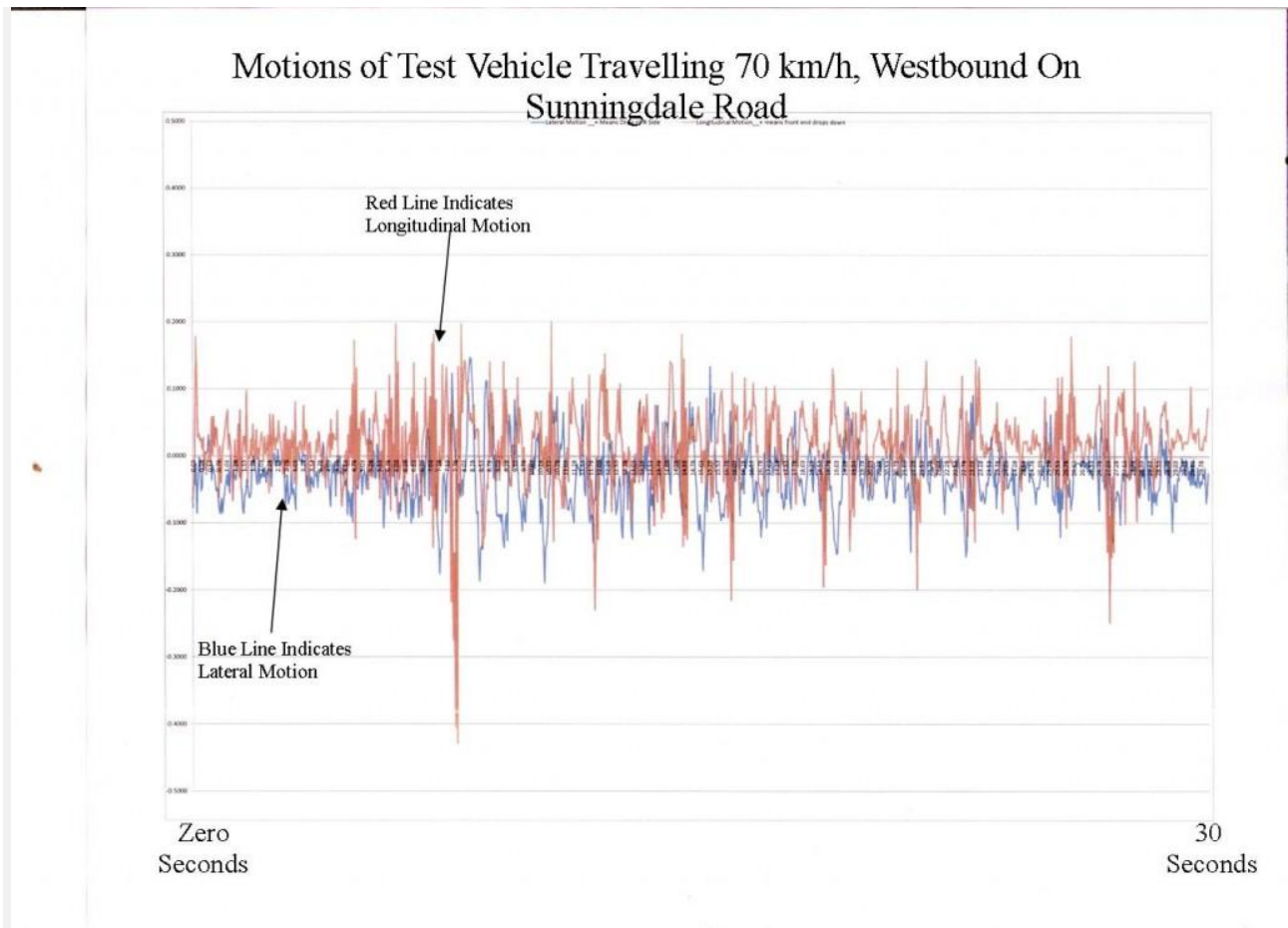
**February 25, 2014**

## **iPhone Gyro Function Generates Detailed Data of Road Conditions for Accident Analysis**

Previous articles on the Gorski Consulting website have discussed the use of the Apple iPhone to generate data about roadway conditions. We have uploaded a new article on the Articles page of this website which discusses a more refined procedure that combines the iPhone data with multiple video cameras that show conditions such as driver eye motions, braking and steering, and others. The present article focuses on data from three different roadways to demonstrate how the iPhone data can be used to differentiate between the characteristics of each road. A couple of charts from that article are shown below.



The lateral and longitudinal motion of a test vehicle (captured by an iPhone) travelling along Highway 401 indicate a relatively smooth ride and good road surface.



The lateral and longitudinal motions of a test vehicle (captured by an iPhone) travelling on Sunningdale Road show the excessive motion and indications that the road surface is in poor condition.

**February 24, 2014**

### **Cause of Death of Jordan Strickland Will Likely Remain Unknown**

Like so many previous tragic accidents in Ontario, the one which caused the death of 27-year-old Jordan Strickland on Friday, February 21, 2014 will only remain “investigated” but never unraveled. While some believe this is acceptable, some also believe that family, friends and the general public have a right to know the details.

When police close an accident site to “investigate” a serious collision it is supposed to be done as a “service” in the interests of our society. Mainly the closure is to prevent evidence from being disturbed or destroyed before it can be documented. However it is

also done because the notion prevails that it is important to respect “privacy” for the individuals close to the situation such as the family. But there are other issues involved that, in our opinion, are being ignored.

In the last several years, when we opened this website, we have travelled to a number of collision sites to report on our findings. During some of these visits we have encountered friends and family of the involved persons who might have been killed or sustained serious injuries. Discussion with these persons revealed how little they knew of what occurred and how it occurred. Police or their insurance companies simply did not share any meaningful information about what they might have learned. Similarly we observed how little information is reported in the public news media.

Although our business survives on the basis of being hired to examine such incidents, we have made it a point of principle not to accept any form of payment, or being retained by those individuals we meet at such occasions. Our goal is strictly a public service; to provide information and guidance when we recognize that such is not being made available. We have provided that advice and guidance without monetary gain, fame or publicity and will continue to do so whenever possible.

The collision involving Jordan Strickland was initially well reported by the London Free Press. But since the day of the accident essentially nothing further has been revealed. One need only look at a few news reports to recognize how this is just a continual, repetitive process. Essentially nothing of substance is revealed to the public in these matters.

Constable Kevin Howe was quoted as saying that the collision was a “T-bone” type. Later it was indicated that “investigators haven’t said what caused the collision, but there were high winds and **slick** roads at the time of the crash”. Yet an earlier report indicated “high winds and **wet** roads could have been among the factors that caused the crash”. So what was the actual fact? Were the roads just wet or were they “slick”. Because “slick” draws up a different connotation. “Slick” suggests slippery and icy, not just wet. As a service to the public should it not be an important function of police to inform the public when conditions existed that might have led to a death?

Where is the education that might prevent a similar tragedy? Where is the commentary that discusses the fact that vehicles such as mini-vans are more prone to loss-of-control,

not only because of their design, but in special cases, where there is a strong wind, the large area formed by the side of a van can sustain more force from that wind than the typical design of a passenger car. Where is the education that reminds the public that, even though ambient temperatures might cause wet roads, strong winds cause a wind chill, which, in certain open areas of a highway, can cause drastic reductions in temperature at the level of the road surface. Such wind chill in open areas can freeze water intermittently and fool a driver into the belief that roads are only wet. The possibility of the existence of a combination of strong winds and intermittent, icy, road conditions could easily cause a loss-of-control rotation of a vehicle. Is that not worth mentioning? Is that discussion not worth the potential of preventing a future death?

**February 21, 2014**

### **London Free Press Report of Serious Accident On Egremont Drive This Afternoon Is An Example of Excellent Journalism**

While we were critical of journalists in our earlier report shown below, we are also willing to applaud those members of the news media who produce news the way it should be.

The London Free Press was exceptionally quick in its development of an article related to a serious-injury collision that reportedly occurred on Egremont Drive this afternoon near Ivan Drive, on the north-west outskirts of London, Ontario. It noted that the collision occurred at 1500 hours and the LFP article was posted at 1842 hours.

It is not only the timing that is helpful but the LFP also posted three important photographs of the vehicles at their final rest positions. A Jeep with front end damage was shown straddling the shoulder and roadside while a silver van was shown in front of the Jeep, lying on its driver's side with significant crush to its right side.



On-site photograph produced by the London Free Press newspaper showing the two vehicles at their final rest positions.

Granted there was a mix-up in the reported information such that the body of the article reported that a passenger in the Jeep was taken to hospital with critical injuries while the caption to one of the photos indicated that the right passenger of the van was the one who sustained the critical level injuries. But that is understandable given the short time frame and readers should understand that. By examining the photos we can come to an informed belief that the critically injured occupant was likely the passenger in the van, not the Jeep. However, if the LFP had not submitted the photos along with the article the confusion could not be cleared up.

It is important for the public to understand that, when their vehicle travels out of control, the side of their vehicle will encounter the front end of an opposing vehicle and there is a very serious threat to the passenger of that loss-of-control vehicle. This is a common occurrence and needs to be known. And we need to pay close attention to why vehicles enter into a state of loss-of-control because it leads to very serious consequences.

From our experience many family and friends of the persons involved in a collision actually want to obtain information about what happened. Although it is difficult to escape the occasion when some persons are offended by photos depicting a vehicle where their beloved was injured or killed, there are important reasons to show them, when done with tact.

We want to congratulate the London Free Press by showing others in the news media and the public that professional journalism has not been lost...it just wanders at times.

### **Liability for Injuries to Danny Gibbons of Petrolia Ontario In February 13, 2014 Rollover**

Danny Gibbons of Petrolia, Ontario was reportedly one of four occupants in a vehicle that was involved in a rollover collision on Oil Springs Line on the evening of February 13, 2014. He reportedly remains in a coma from head injuries he sustained in that crash. As usual, few details were reported about the crash except that the 22-year-old driver, Ben Waite, was charged with impaired driving causing bodily harm and driving while being over the legal limit.

In one of the news articles about the crash it was stated that one of the passengers of the vehicle claimed "...the vehicle was travelling too fast when it hit black ice...".

Whether one is alcohol-impaired or sober, 22-years-old or 90-years-old, ice encountered on a road surface is an important factor that can cause a crash. But none of the news articles obtained an official comment from police whether the claim made by the passenger was an actual fact.

Any person can produce a fairy-tale. Much of these are seen on television, in movie theatres or from live actors. Journalism used to separate itself from these fantasies by upholding its responsibility to report information to the public that is based on fact. When the public no longer receives relevant, fact-based information this threatens the foundations upon which a stable society thrives. The omission of the road surface conditions in the present article may seem innocent enough, however, when tax payers are enticed by their politicians to lower tax rates by under-funding road maintenance departments those decisions have consequences, such as icy roadways, and those lead to injuries and fatalities. Mis-informing the public that accidents are solely caused by alcohol consumption or speed is simply a lie, no matter how it may be sugar-coated.

We hope that, on this website, you will continue to receive our comments on whatever information we can obtain from the small bits of relevant information that can be retrieved from the myriad of propaganda that surrounds motor vehicle accident causation.

**February 19, 2014**

**Little Said of Cause of Fatality on Highway 59 Just South of Woodstock Ontario**

Not surprisingly, nothing has been said regarding the cause of a single vehicle collision on Highway 59 south of Woodstock, Ontario on the evening of February 17, 2014, in which 76-year-old Joseph Hughes was killed. The CTV news video footage of Kitchener and London showed that the vehicle travelled down a steep embankment somewhere between Patullo Avenue and Greenly Line and came to rest on its wheels. Although there was some roof crush at the driver's head region such intrusion is often survivable, particularly in newer model vehicles. Otherwise there appeared to be relatively minor damage to other, visible portions of the vehicle. It is likely that this vehicle was not travelling at highway speed when it left the roadway.

However when vehicles travel down a significant embankment there is a substantial time element involved during which an occupant can be displaced from their normal seating position. Thus, even though a seat-belt may be worn, and even though various inflatable cushions may deploy, an occupant may become out of position to benefit from these safety systems. Thus it is obviously important to avoid situations where vehicles may enter into such a steep and significant vertical drop.

The question that has not been raised is, what roadside barriers were in existence to prevent a vehicle travelling over the significant embankment? It is revealing that neither the investigating police nor the news media have raised that question or informed the public about this important issue. Highway 59 was once a Provincial highway and this means that its higher traffic volume received a higher level of service. This means that where ever there were significant drops in elevation on the roadside there should have been barriers installed because of the higher probability that a vehicle might travel over such an embankment. So, was there a proper barrier installed at this location? No one can be certain without attending the actual site since the present information does not indicate the precise collision location.

**February 14, 2014**

## **Three Toronto Crown Attorneys Fight Each Other In Late-Night Bar Fight, Two Sent To Hospital**

For many years in downtown London, Ontario there has been a restaurant named the “Honest Lawyer”. A respectful-appearing name except when you look closely at the exterior back wall of its building, as shown in the photo below. There appear to be flames crawling up from somewhere beneath.



Respectfully, the Honest Lawyer restaurant in downtown London, Ontario has some interesting "flames" painted beneath its banner.

No one in London talks about the sign, or the obvious reference to hell bubbling up from below. No one will venture to say the obvious in public but everyone knows the connotation.

Much like the sign, little is being said about the news article published by the Toronto Star newspaper today, February 14, 2014, about the fight that reportedly took place on Sunday, February 9th, at the Old Stone Cottage Pub, in the Toronto suburb of Scarborough. The police only indicated that a crown attorney, Constantinos Stratos, has been charged with assault. But no one will officially say what took place.

But the Toronto Star newspaper wrote that “legal and police sources with knowledge of the incident” told them what happened. A fight broke out between Stratos and fellow crown attorney, James Dunda. In the ensuing battle a third, female, crown attorney, Lisa Will, tried to step between the two and was accidentally struck in the face, causing her to lose a tooth. Whether that is what actually happened will not matter in the grand scheme of things because that is the story that the public has heard and it is the only story that the public has heard.

It is interesting to us how the official “wagons” of justice were quickly drawn into a circle so that nothing could be leaked out...or so is the apparent attempt. The Star reported that police would not say whom Stratos was charged with assaulting. The Star reported that a spokesperson for the Ministry of the Attorney General would not be able to provide further details “as the matter has yet to appear in court”. Nothing could be said about Stratos’ employment status because the ministry “does not comment on human resources matters”. The Star reported that they asked the Law Society whether they were investigating the incident and were told that only incidents that result in a disciplinary hearing are reported publicly and that dismissed or internally resolved complaints are kept secret. The Star did not know when Stratos would appear in court as police did not respond to their request for the date of the first court appearance. Some things resonate much greater in a vacuum of silence.

We have come to know, admire and respect a number of lawyers over the years from professional and personal contacts. Others, well, let us leave that in silence as it resonates much better; like that sign.

But there are also professional reputations at stake. There are the lives of persons who might have given a great deal of effort to do the right thing throughout their lives. They may have families and possibly dependents who rely on them. Someone in this threesome may be totally innocent of anything except that they happened to be in the midst of someone who was guilty. What will happen before any court date? Those three

names will mill around in the underground, maybe not mentioned in public, but present in many peoples' conscious.

We can only applaud this extremely well thought out strategy to fail to inform the public about what really happened as quickly as possible. This failure will obviously improve the high regard in which persons in the justice system are now held. When the crown attorneys attend their next court appearance the public will look upon them as symbols of what they are.

**February 13, 2014**

### **\$800 to \$1000 To Equip A Single Police Officer With A Video Camera – And You Ask Why?**

We have long proposed the idea that police should be equipped with a variety of cameras, both to photograph evidence as well as to document their interactions with the public. However there has always been a resistance to that notion and various excuses have always been proposed – including cost.

Well, a new pilot project is being described by local news media that officers from several small municipal police forces north of London will be equipped with video cameras, just to see what will happen.

We already know what will happen. It is obvious in the cost of the project.

\$800 to \$1000 is said to be the cost of outfitting a single officer with a video camera. We use GoPro cameras in much of our testing. We could buy a used GoPro with high definition 1080P video for under \$150. We could purchase a new, long life battery for the camera that could make it run most of the day for about \$50. Yet, the police cannot obtain anything for five times that price. No wonder we have been told that it would not economically feasible for police to wear video cameras. The cameras they must wear must be studded in diamonds.

## **Questionable If Public Receiving Truthful Traffic Information**

Over recent years Gorski Consulting has been critical of the actions of news media and official entities such as police and government transportation agencies who have demonstrated their questionable reporting of traffic facts.

For example, each year various official entities report the previous year's number of collisions at intersections and news media use superlatives such as "dangerous", etc. to describe those intersections receiving the highest numbers of collisions. None of these official entities explain to the public that basic factors such as traffic volume play a role in the number of collisions at any particular intersection. But there are numerous other factors that also come into play that no one explains. The result is that the public's decisions are affected to the point that some will deliberately avoid a particular intersection fearing its danger while in other instances they apply mis-guided pressure on local politicians to make adjustments to roads that do not require those adjustments. This type of misinformation amounts to a danger to the public.

Similarly, each year the Canadian Automobile Association publicize their annual "Worst Roads" campaign. This develops when the public is asked to report what they believe to be the worst road and then the sum of all these responses is reported so that the road segment receiving the most complaints is judged to be the worst road. While this action may appear innocuous it is far from that. The vast majority of the public does not understand what road segments should require immediate treatment yet this campaign causes unreasonable pressure to be placed on local politicians to spend money on that "Worst Road" when in fact there are likely other road segments that should receive that repair that do not because the money has been diverted. This can be another danger to the public when unsafe roads are not repaired because unreasonable and uninformed pressure is being placed by the Worst Roads campaign to make a mess of reasoned judgment. If the CAA was interested in truly helping the public it would perform an objective test of each road segment that receives complaints and then report on the results of that objective test along with the noted citizen complaints. At Gorski Consulting we have just discussed our latest data acquisition system (see our article on the Articles webpage of this site) which develops detailed information about road surface condition and geometry, along with driver actions to determine which road segments might be less safe. However none of that kind of testing has ever been discussed or suggested by the CAA.

More recently various police agencies have discussed their partnership with a private company, Accident Support Services, which provide a traffic data reporting program called the “Collision Reporting & Occurrence Management System” (CROMS) which is reportedly being used by increasing numbers of police forces in Canada and the U.S. to automate the documentation of collision information. Some police forces are publicizing that their use of such data management systems can provide them with valuable information about the causes of collisions and how they can target their road safety campaigns. While some benefits may be gained there is a danger when police, who are often untrained in basic statistics and research methods, come to the belief that certain numbers mean something that they do not.

As an example, in a recent Chatham Daily News article the Chatham-Kent Police Service claimed that the 10 fatal collisions that occurred in 2013 in their region was double the number that occurred in 2012. The news reporter then termed this trend as “disturbing”. Yet none of the persons involved in this story appeared understand that a fluctuation of 5 collisions from one year to another is most likely a fact of random variance that cannot be used to conclude anything.

In that same news story Chatham-Kent police also reportedly came to the belief that, since 7 of those 10 fatal collisions were single vehicle events, many of which resulted in vehicles “crashing into a ditch”, that this was indicative of driver error. But there was no information provided as to how this conclusion came to be. There can be numerous reasons why drivers die in single vehicle collisions and many of those are not properly understood or researched during police investigations. The police focus is on laying charges and they do not conduct the proper and sufficient analysis necessary to determine that other facts beyond driver error may be present.

In another example, as reported by Tim Alamenciak of the Toronto Star newspaper, there was a sudden decrease in traffic fines being handed out in Toronto in 2013 versus 2012. It was reported that there was a 31 % decrease from 425,794 to 294,407. It was speculated that this was a black-mailing tactic by the Toronto Police to reduce the income of the City of Toronto as a result of the City’s decision to reduce the police budget. Various red-faced officials scrambled around to legitimize the numbers as due to random variation and also perhaps a true indication of the driving public’s safety consciousness. Where ever the truth may lie it is most likely that the public will not be properly informed of the true mechanisms at play.

The true facts as we see them is that traffic facts and statistics are being manipulated by many official entities and there are no repercussions to those who would do so.

**February 11, 2014**

### **Paisley Ontario Snow bank Receiving Attention But Others Also Exist**

Recently there has been national attention being paid to a tall snow bank near Paisley, Ontario as residents have begun writing messages in the extremely large bank on the side of a highway. Well, that is not the only snow bank that has such enormous dimensions. Although the areas north of London toward Owen Sound have received more snow, certain isolated sections of highway south of London have also received very large quantities of snow. For example we located a curve of Highbury Avenue South, just south of the Elgin County border with a huge snow bank on the west roadside as demonstrated in the photo below.



Northerly view of very large snow bank located on Highbury Ave South at the intersection with Carr Road. This area is just south of the Elgin County border.

While we are accustomed to seeing signs warning of falling rocks in various mountain regions, it is exceptional to see very large “rocks” of hardened snow rolling off this large snow bank so close to the highway. The additional concern is that lines of sight that normally exist for the safety of the driving public may be diminished to unsafe limits.

This winter period has been exceptional in that there has not been a period of warmer weather that normally provides an opportunity to melt some of the accumulated snow. And more snow is forecast for the South-Western Ontario region in the upcoming days.

### **Video Eyeglasses, iPhone and Multiple Video Cameras – Review of an Effective System for Analysis and Reconstruction of Motor Vehicle Collisions**

At Gorski Consulting we have been engaged in the development of a system of instruments and procedures that can be used to assess a variety of motor vehicle accident related issues. Some of this work has been discussed in previous articles on this website. However we continue to make additions and refinements and we have now uploaded a new article on the Articles page of this article has been prepared to review the most recent developments. This article discusses the use of video eyeglasses to explore a driver’s head and eye motions. This is combined with the ability to document accelerometer and gyro data to document the forces exerted on the test vehicle. The system also documents other driver actions such as braking, acceleration and steering via multiple video cameras. The combined system forms a powerful, yet inexpensive tool for exploring how a collision might have occurred. The system’s functioning is demonstrated through some roadway testing.

**February 9, 2014**

### **Two Persons In Critical Condition From Head-On Collision on Highbury Ave Near Glanworth Drive**

It is reported that a collision occurred at approximately 1945 hours yesterday, Saturday, February 8, 2014 on Highbury Avenue near the intersection with Glanworth Drive. Two persons in one vehicle sustained critical-level injuries while two others in a second vehicle sustained minor injuries. Such injury circumstances often occur when one

vehicle enters into a state of loss-of-control; that being the vehicle with the critically-injured occupants.

The photos below were taken on the afternoon of February 9th, 2014 and provide some indication of the roadway geometry.





Snow had fallen during February 9th, so the specific road surface conditions at the time of the accident cannot be known unless revealed by the investigating police.

**February 7, 2014**

## **Oh Canada – Snow & More Snow**

Of course, Canadians are used to winter and snow. However in the last 20 years winter has been rather mild in South-Western Ontario. This is what is surprising as this winter season has brought residents back to the days of the 1970s when cold weather and storms were common.



This snow bank in the Argyle Mall parking lot in London, Ontario, Canada is a reminder of the large quantities of snow that have not had an opportunity to melt in the cold temperatures of the current winter season.

The snow that has fallen this season has not had a chance to melt as temperatures have continually been well below average. The large snow banks that have grown make it more difficult for drivers' visibility around them. While the London area has these difficulties these are nothing compared to the tremendous snow banks existing to the north and near the eastern shores of Lake Huron. Local news media are showing continuous snow banks near Paisley, Ontario that are 11 feet tall. This is not surprising as snow squalls have continually pummeled this area for the last several months.

So driving in Southern-Western Ontario has become interesting...

**February 6, 2014**

## **Launch of \$18 Million Civil Lawsuit With Respect to Injuries Suffered by Tyler Brooks-Szabo**

\$18 million dollars would sound like a lot of money. It is a claim being made by the mother of Tyler Brooks-Szabo as a result of the injuries the 10-year-old boy suffered in a collision on October 25th, 2013 on Wexford Ave. in east London. With the type of severe brain injury being reported, costs for maintenance over the life expectancy of this boy would be expected to be extremely large. But the question still remains, what actually happened and why did it happen?

Toby Vanlieshout was reportedly the driver of a car that entered a left curve on Wexford Ave., after sunset, and it was reported that he had to avoid a car that was parked on the outside of the curve. The vehicle veered toward the inside of the curve, mounted the curb, and reportedly struck Tyler who was located on the sidewalk of the road.

High speed could have been an issue, but what was the actual speed?

This road did not have any artificial illumination and this issue seems have been ignored by all local news media. The fact that the parked car may not have been properly illuminated is an important issue. What was the traffic volume of Wexford Avenue and what was the obligation of the City of London to install artificial illumination on this road? Why is this obvious question being ignored? It is interesting that the law suit has not even considered including the City of London as a defendant in the action.

## **Gorski Consulting Experimenting With Basic Eye-Tracking Device for Motor Vehicle Accident Reconstruction**

Many analysts in the field of motor vehicle accident reconstruction must deal with estimates of reasonable delays for driver perception and response. When doing so they rely on data published by researchers whom they do not know and the procedures by which data was obtained are not fully spelt out. A better alternative would be for these analysts to conduct their own studies. However, up to now, the specialized hardware needed to perform these studies has been too costly.

Gorski Consulting has been experimenting with some low-cost equipment that could rectify this problem. While the equipment has its short-comings it is functional enough that data of sufficient precision can be obtained. The equipment involves the purchase of some low cost video glasses (sunglasses) that have a video camera attached to the frame at the bridge of the nose. An anchorage has been extended forward from these glasses to attach a small mirror that points at one of the subject's eyes. Thus the eye motions are videotaped as a subject drives a vehicle and then those motions are studied in a video-editing program (Adobe Premiere).



While more sophisticated systems for driver eye tracking exist, the system shown in this photo is extremely inexpensive and therefore affordable for use by most analysts who want to experiment their own studies.

Multiple video cameras that were used in previous studies are also included in the system so that a full documentation of essentially everything with the vehicle and around it is provided. We have been conducting testing with this system in the last couple of weeks and hope to report on the results in an up-coming article on the Articles page of this website.

**February 3, 2014**

## **Collision of Two School Buses at Intersection of Littlewood And Carriage Drive in South-West London, Ontario**

It is not common to see an impact between two school buses. However, it is reported that at approximately 1530 hours this afternoon an Elgie Bus Lines bus was travelling westbound on Littlewood Drive when it collided with a Murphy Bus Lines bus that was northbound on Carriage Drive. Photos at the accident site showed that the westbound Elgie bus then rolled over west of the intersection on the south side of Littlewood. The northbound Murphy school bus appeared to have stopped at the north edge of the intersection and therefore it could not have been travelling very quickly at the time of impact. Furthermore, the fact that the Elgie School bus came to rest on the south side of Littlewood means that it was not re-directed in the expected north-west direction that would normally be expected from an impact between two vehicles approaching from the described directions. It makes for a curious happening but there are insufficient details available to understand how and why this occurred.

News media report that the Elgie School bus driver may have failed to stop for the stop sign at the intersection. Given the sunny weather conditions the visibility of regulatory signs like this is often an issue.

While school buses are designed to provide a certain level of safety for students who are not provided with seat belts, there is never a guarantee that all the safety features will work as intended and designed. Substantial work has been involved to try to keep children from being ejected in such a bus rollover but one can never be certain that this will be successful in a real event. Although no passengers were reportedly injured in the crash there was no real opportunity for that because the Murphy bus was reportedly carrying no passengers while the Elgie bus was only transporting an 18-year-old female. A true test, and hopefully it will not occur in any near future, is when such a school bus is loaded with small children when it rolls. Hopefully those anti-ejection designs will work when called for.

A fatal motorcycle collision occurred at this intersection in July of 2013.

**February 1, 2014**

## **Are Pedestrian (School) Crossing Guards Really That Necessary?**



We see them constantly on our roadsides on our way to and from work – those brightly-coloured “Crossing Guards” with their fancy stop signs that make us late for work. Do we really need them?

We rarely notice the duties of pedestrian (school) crossing guards until we are inconvenienced. We are in a rush to get to work. Maybe we’re late for an appointment. And pow, just when we really need to get somewhere, out jumps this brightly-dressed, fancy person with the bright red “Stop” sign that tells us it is their corner and they have decided that you will be stopped. When you pass by again on another day you see the person sitting in their comfy lawn chair and doing nothing, and you wonder, what are we paying these people to do?



It is not until we are inconvenienced by them that we start to notice that pedestrian crossing guards appear to just sit around on comfy lawn chairs and must be of little functional use.

The reality is that collision occurrence is not that simple. In fact it is very complicated. When we send children out every day to mix with busy drivers who are not focused on their safe driving bad things can happen...and pedestrian crossing guards are that insurance we pay for to reduce those tragedies.

Take a look at this simple (and complicated) example taken from a City of London street a few days ago. The series of photos below was taken while approaching a relatively busy intersection that is bounded by two elementary schools. This intersection is regularly patrolled by a school crossing guard but on this particular occasion the guard was not present. At the same time, this was a garbage pick-up day and so a typical, city garbage truck is seen moving along making regular stops along the roadside.



Photo 1 – Approaching a city garbage truck that is making regular stops near an intersection which is normally patrolled by a school crossing guard but on this particular moment the guard is absent.

In Photo 1 we see that there is an uncontrolled intersection in the foreground where there are a number of pedestrians on both sides of the road. There is another intersection in the background that is controlled by a typical traffic signal. The pedestrians on the left side of the road are mostly blocked from view by passing traffic on the main road as well as by a white van that is also intending to enter the main road.



Photo 2 – View showing the garbage truck making a stop just past the intersection while a group of children are preparing to cross the road from the right to the left.

We see in Photo 2 how the white van makes a right turn and continues to block our view of the pedestrians that are still on the left sidewalk and could potentially enter the road. Yet another group of child pedestrians can be seen on the right roadside and they are close to the curb while contemplating whether to enter into the road. Note in the background of Photo 2 that the traffic signal is red for traffic on the main road so no traffic would be expected to continue moving along this road to the location of the pedestrians.



Photo 3 – View showing that the way appears to be clear for the child pedestrians to attempt to cross the road because the traffic signal in the background is red and therefore no through traffic should be expected.

Photo 3 shows that no traffic should be expected to reach the location of the pedestrians because the traffic signal in the background is red and there are no vehicles in the vicinity. There is the garbage truck blocking the children's view but that shouldn't be very important... or should it? The children are looking toward the direction of the camera and not toward the area of visibility blockage caused by the garbage truck.

There are many instances where good Samaritans will stop and wave such a group of children on to allow them to cross the road. Meanwhile, as if out of nowhere, a white pick-up truck emerges and had the children entered the road there could have been a potential collision.



Photo 4 shows that, just when the way would appear to be clear, we see a white pick-up truck has appeared, apparently from nowhere.

Where did this pick-up truck come from? Well it came from the cross road where the vehicle had a green light.

Some creative analysts of this scenario would comment that this is not a realistic depiction because the white pick-up truck just does not miraculously appear out of nowhere like this. If the children had begun to cross and if a good Samaritan was waving them on then both of them would have had ample time to look in the direction of the Pick-up truck and observe its approach. But now this is the important part that we fail to understand.

Humans attend to only one thing at a time. Sometimes that attention can change very rapidly to make it seem like we are attending to many things at once but that is not the reality. We tend to focus our attention on important things. In the case of the children and good Samaritan the importance would be to make good eye contact and exchange information about their intentions. So their focus will be on each other and not on other

matters in their periphery. And this is why the white Pick-up truck seems to appear out of nowhere. Because, much like a magician's slight-of-hand, our attention was drawn away from the truck by something seemingly more important, and then, by the time our attention was brought back to the area of that Pick-up truck it just miraculously appeared, with all the smoke and mirrors of the typical magician's show. Then, on the witness stand, the lawyer asks you why you did not see something that was so obviously there to be seen, and everyone shakes their head.

So, back to pedestrian crossing guard, there is an important reason to have this seemingly lazy person sitting on their seemingly comfy lawn chair. While at times they appear to be minimally challenged, their business is knowing how to get people across a street safely and, if they have any experience at it, they have likely seen all those magician's tricks many times over. On any given day they have experienced numerous instances, on busy roads like these, where drivers do something unexpected, or the situation is just slightly different than it was before. Crossing guards become attune to this, much like basketball players become used to dribbling a ball, blind persons can "see" through their canes, and our mothers knew exactly when we were headed toward the cookie jar even when they were not in the same room. Crossing guards have that experience that our children do not. In fact they have more experience than anyone else about how to get someone safely across the road because that is their specialization.



Pedestrian (school) crossing guards are that insurance we carry to increase the probability that our children will come home safe.

# Gorski Consulting

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