Our Transportation System is in Crisis – 187

On Tuesday April 20, 2010 a loaded ten-tonne goods truck crossed the southbound carriageway of the Solomon Hochoy Highway near Gasparillo just after midday and crashed into a 4x4 pickup on the northbound carriageway, killing all three occupants of the pickup: father, 63, mother, 60, and daughter, 24, who was married only two months ago. Newspaper reports stated that it was raining heavily and that the truck suffered a tyre blow-out and the driver lost control.

This reminds me that the authorities are much too slow in prioritising the implementation of appropriate traffic safety measures. On February 5, 2009 I wrote in this series "*Travelling on the Solomon Hochoy Highway (SHH) can be a frightening experience, particularly during off-peak hours. The traffic speeds are usually quite high, with large trucks and vans often competing effectively with cars. And these large trucks and vans often hog the right lane of the two directional lanes.* [and] … *in any year there is a one in thirty likelihood that a vehicle on the SHH may be involved in a head-on crash with another vehicle from the opposing carriageway, with usually fatal consequences; there is also a one in two chance that a vehicle will be involved in a rear-end crash; and, a one in three chance that there will be an out-of-control vehicle on the route*."

Even before that, I wrote on September 25, 2008, that "*The frequent contributory factors for median-barrier crashes on highways are improper lane changes, driver losing control of vehicle, travelling too fast for weather conditions, exceeding the posted speed limit, and forced vehicle movement or avoidance manoeuvres.*

"*Medians separate opposing traffic streams, provide a recovery area for out-of-control vehicles, and provide a place for vehicles to stop in the event of an emergency. In addition, some medians and median barriers can potentially reduce oncoming headlight glare from vehicles.*

"*Work done by the Transportation Research Board (TRB) in their NCHRP Report No. 500 Volume 20 entitled "A Guide for Reducing Head-On Crashes on Freeways," recommend inter alia that we can minimize the likelihood of head-on crashes with an on-coming vehicle by the following: (a) Provide wider medians; (b) Improve median design for vehicle recovery: (i) roadway edge drop-offs; (ii) Install paved median shoulder; and (iii) Design for safer slopes; (c) Install median barriers for narrow-width medians.* [and] *The three-strand cable median barrier is widely used, and requires periodic re-tensioning of the cables and may need adjustment each time the barrier is struck. This writer recommends it be considered for the Solomon Hochoy Highway*."

Newsday reported on Saturday April 24, 2010 a statement from the Transport Minister that "*High tension cable wire barriers will be erected within the next month along the Solomon Hochoy Highway to prevent motorists from crossing the median between the north bound and south bound lanes.* [and] … *the highway was chosen to test the barriers because it possesses the longest stretch of grass median in the country. He said similar barriers will also be placed on the Churchill Roosevelt Highway in the vicinity of Trincity Mall*." What have we been waiting for—more out-of-control crossovers?

A study by the US State of Washington showed that a barrier placed in median sections up to 15 metres wide is cost effective, and that cable barrier is the most cost-effective system. The cable barrier is either placed near the centre or the edge of the median. The main advantage of the centre is that fewer impacts are expected, as some motorists that have left the roadway may be able to recover before striking the barrier; incidental impacts maintenance operations can be minimized. Disadvantages of placing the barrier at the centre are: (a) terrain irregularities on the median slopes and the ditch can affect vehicle stability from both directions; and (b) barrier placed on the grassy portions of the median will require mowing and weed control. The disadvantage most often cited for placing barrier on the edge of shoulder is more frequent impacts from the near side and the potential for incidental impacts from maintenance operations.

Another location that requires median separators urgently is the Churchill Roosevelt Highway between Aranguez and the Uriah Butler Highway. The existing median is about 600 mm wide and only 75-100mm high. New Jersey Type concrete barriers have been needed for a long time!

e-mail: info@ccost.org