

## Deerfoot barrier pledge months late, critics say

Installation to run north from 16th Ave.

**Gwendolyn Richards and Sarah Chapman, with files from Colette Derworiz, Calgary Herald**

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A plan to install a new type of barrier along Deerfoot Trail north of 16th Avenue N. to prevent fatal collisions is being welcomed by the police and aldermen, but families of those killed along that stretch of highway say a barrier should have been in place months ago.

Deerfoot Trail between 16th Avenue and Country Hills Boulevard will be divided by a new post-and-cable system designed to prevent vehicles from crossing the median or re-entering traffic, Alberta Infrastructure Minister Lyle Oberg said Wednesday.

The province is also looking at extending it beyond Country Hills Boulevard, to the proposed Stoney Trail interchange.

The news comes too late for Tracie Taylor, who was seven-months pregnant when a car crossed the Deerfoot median in August and struck her minivan, crushing her abdomen.

Trauma suffered in the accident was fatal for Adam Jakob Taylor, who lived for only a few hours after an emergency caesarean section.

"They should have been up after the first fatality," Taylor said Wednesday. "If they were put up after the first accident, I would still have my son."

Taylor wants to see the proposal to extend the barrier from where she was hit near Country Hills Boulevard to the future Stoney Trail interchange finalized immediately.

"How many more lives have to be sacrificed?" she asked. "There was an accident (Tuesday) where a gentleman crossed the median (north of Country Hills) and hit a semi . . . and they're putting a price tag on it. Today was a hard day for us."

Steven Walsh, 28, and his four-year-old son Jordan McKinley-Walsh died in May after Walsh lost control of his car on southbound Deerfoot near 64th Avenue N.E. and swerved into the northbound lanes, colliding with an oncoming car.

In June, city council asked the provincial government to examine the possibility of adding dividers to improve safety along the busy stretch of road.



CREDIT: Leah Hennel, Calgary Herald

Tracie Taylor says her newborn son would not have died if a barrier had been installed on Deerfoot Trail before she was involved in a collision.

In light of the crashes, Oberg ordered a safety review. Alberta Infrastructure officials came back recommending the province install concrete barriers from 16th Avenue N. north to Beddington Trail.

But the crash that claimed the Taylors' baby happened closer to Country Hills, prompting Oberg to extend the barrier farther north.

Concrete barriers are in place along southern sections of Deerfoot, but in the north, traffic has been separated by a wide, grassy median, said Alberta Infrastructure spokesman Bart Johnson.

"Most vehicles that leave the road can recover in that space," he said.

But the traditional type of barrier is necessary in areas where the median is too narrow for a grassy strip; however, concrete barriers can present their own dangers.

"Putting barriers in a space like that might create more hazards than what it's trying to solve," Johnson said.

The new barrier system, which uses collapsible poles and steel cables, is designed to not only prevent vehicles from crossing the median, but also from ricocheting back into traffic.

"It absorbs the impact of the car. It basically grabs the car like a spiderweb," Oberg said.

Johnson added that the new system causes fewer and less-serious injuries to people in vehicles that collide with the barrier and less damage to the vehicles.

The head of the Calgary Police Service's traffic section said the new technology looks good.

"It seems to do the trick," Insp. Bill Sherlock said after watching a video of the barrier in use. "If it keeps vehicles from both crossing the median and from bouncing back into the travel lanes, it will optimize safety."

Traffic police have been interested in seeing a barrier go in, particularly in the wake of recent collisions.

"When drivers make an error, there was no safety net. And this should actually present a safety net that should keep them from being in serious collisions," Sherlock said.

Ald. Helen Larocque, who helped lobby for a barrier, said it's clear the provincial government recognized there was a problem along Deerfoot Trail.

"It's a good start," she said. "I am content because it covers the area in my ward where there have been fatalities."

The new system -- to be installed in the spring at a cost of \$1 million -- is used in several states south of the border, but this will be the first time it is installed in Alberta.

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Crashes where vehicles crossed Deerfoot median:

- November 2005: A man driving a truck lost control on Deerfoot Trail one kilometre north of Country Hills Boulevard and crossed the median. He collided with a tractor-trailer and was ejected from his vehicle. He is in critical condition at the Foothills hospital.

- August 2005: Claire Jensen and Pam Jensen, mother and daughter, were killed when their car clipped an SUV and crossed the median south of Country Hills Boulevard, striking a minivan head-on. A pregnant passenger in the minivan, Tracie Taylor, went into emergency surgery to deliver her baby son, Adam Jakob Taylor, who died hours later.

- May 2005: Steven Walsh and his four-year-old son, Jordan McKinley-Walsh, died after Walsh lost control of his car on southbound Deerfoot and swerved across to the northbound lanes and into the path of an oncoming Cadillac.

- October 2004: A southbound vehicle crossed the median on Deerfoot Trail, causing a head-on collision. A 69-year-old man, a 50-year-old woman and a man, 28, were injured.

- April 2004: Attiq Ur Rehman was heading north on Deerfoot Trail near 64th Avenue N.E. when he lost control of his car and spun into the southbound lanes, striking another car. The 35-year-old taxi driver died at the scene.

- November 2003: A medical condition led to a crash that saw Sharon Firth cross the median on Deerfoot Trail. Her car collided with another, killing Firth and the driver of the other car, Scott Dick.