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HIGHWAY SAFETY »

Fatal accident underlines need for median barriers

The cable barriers are being installed on I-70, coming next year along I-44.

NEWS-LEADER STAFF AND WIRES

Work is progressing on Missouri's busiest interstates to install cable barriers officials hope will prevent crossover crashes like the one that killed a Waynesville man Sunday morning on Interstate 44.

Bobby D. Wilson, 54, was killed Sunday morning on I-44 just west of Rolla after the Dodge van he was driving was struck by a vehicle that skidded across the median, the Missouri Highway Patrol said.

The crash was set in motion when an 2002 Pontiac Trans Am driven by Julie A. Williams, 46, of West Dundee, Ill., struck another vehicle while passing in the eastbound lanes, the patrol said. Both vehicles skidded across the median and into the westbound lanes, where Wilson's van struck Williams' car before sliding into the median and overturning.

Wilson was taken to Phelps County Regional Medical Center, where he was pronounced dead on arrival, the patrol said. Williams was airlifted to Barnes-Jewish Hospital in St. Louis with serious injuries.

The fatal crash comes six months after the Missouri Department of Transportation announced a plan to install 437 more miles of the cable barriers along Interstates 70, 44 and 29 after cables in Warren County proved successful.

That county stretch of I-70 in eastern Missouri has had no fatalities from crossover accidents since the barriers were installed, said Warren County Coroner Roger Mauzy, who led the campaign for the cables after 34 people died in crossover accidents there in a 10-year period.

Since the cables have gone up, only one motorist has been injured after running into it.

"I've gone out on several accidents that have gone into the cables, and people are out there kicking their cars and cussing," Mauzy said. "But at least they're alive to cuss."

Design work is wrapping up on 244 miles of I-44 stretching from St. Louis to Joplin, said MoDOT engineer John Miller. Work should begin early next year and end by December 2007.

In District 8, which includes Greene, Webster and Laclede counties, MoDOT officials divided 60 miles of I-44 slated for barriers into two sections for design purposes. The largest piece is 40 miles between Strafford and Lebanon.

Three strands of cable strung through poles make up the barriers. They cost about \$100,000 a mile to install and about \$20,000 a year per mile to maintain, highway department officials said. Workers have previously installed an average of 3,000 to 5,000 feet of cable per day.

Miller said the devices stop cars about 90 percent of the time.
