

[Back](#)

DoH finally pushing life-saving cable barriers around state September 22, 2005

It took a while, but the West Virginia Division of Highways has gotten religion on the subject of cable barriers in the medians of interstate highways.

Cable barriers are being installed on more than 10 percent of West Virginia's interstates in an attempt to reduce accidents involving vehicles going into or through the median.

Approximately 60 miles of interstate should be equipped with the barriers within the next year as the state attempts to reduce the number of vehicles going into or through the median, said Cindy Cramer, a traffic safety engineer for the Division of Highways, according to The Associated Press.

"As a result of a study that we conducted, just a cursory review of data on the interstates, we noticed a portion of the crashes were from vehicles running off the left side of the road, entering the median or crossing the median -- and in the worst-case scenario, hitting a vehicle head-on in the opposing lane," Cramer said Monday.

It shouldn't have taken a "cursory review" of data to determine that cable barriers reduce accidents and save lives. All anyone in Charleston had to do was pick up the phone and call law enforcement agencies or Division of Highways officials in the Huntington and Barboursville areas and ask them what they have seen in the few years since cable barriers were installed here.

Getting the cable barriers came after several crossover accidents took lives in this area about five years ago. Back in 2003 -- just two years ago -- the Division of Highways insisted on a comprehensive review of the effectiveness of cable barriers after they were installed between the 17th Street West and 29th Street exits of Interstate 64 before committing to installing any more.

Yes, this is what the Huntington area learned years ago, what a Division of Highways study confirmed in 2003 and what DoH officials in Charleston are just getting around to figuring out: Medians need barriers.

People drive fast on four-lane divided highways. Speed limits don't deter them. Weather doesn't deter them. Anyone driving on a four-lane highway is a potential victim of a crossover accident.

Every mile of interstate highway in West Virginia that has a high volume of traffic and nothing more than a grassy median separating lanes needs a cable barrier at the very least. Accident-prone areas need them first.

Work is under way installing barriers on I-64 from the 29th Street exit to the Milton exit. The DoH also plans to install barriers between Teays Valley and Hurricane. Others being planned:

- On I-77 from the Virginia line to Princeton and from Ripley to Ravenswood.
- On I-79 from Jane Lew to Nutter Fort and from Roanoke to Weston.
- On I-68 from the split with I-79 to Sabraton and from Cheat Lake to Coopers Rock.

The total cost of about \$12 million will come from specialized federal safety funds.

It's a start at least. One that is several years overdue.

But there are other areas that need barriers. I-64 from Kentucky to 17th Street West is among them. Perhaps when the bridge replacement work in that area is finished, the DoH can begin installing barriers there. And as long as the state is in the neighborhood, putting barriers in the six-mile stretch from Milton to Hurricane wouldn't hurt, either.