

Daily Herald

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IN OUR VIEW: Provo Canyon: Fix road now

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Another fatal crash raises more urgently than ever the question: What is being done about the road in Provo Canyon?

Not enough. Not by a long shot.

On June 25, a Provo man was killed when his compact car veered across the center line at mile marker 11 on U.S. Highway 189 and smashed into a sport utility vehicle. It was the fourth fatality in three accidents in Provo Canyon within six weeks. Yet the Utah Department of Transportation seems to be sitting on its hands.

On May 18, a Provo woman turned left out of Vivian Park, and her car was broadsided by a pickup. Two children, 8 and 7, were killed. Our editorial of June 15 pointed out that a sign on the opposite side of the road obscures the sight of vehicles coming from the right. A driver exiting the park could glance that way, see nothing, check to the left and pull out -- with potentially deadly consequences.

Why is that sign still there? A workers should be given an ax and ordered to take the thing down -- *now*.

On June 6, a car traveling west at night turned left at Squaw Peak Road. An eastbound vehicle T-boned it, killing a BYU student athlete. The dangers there are obvious. The driver goes into a left-turn lane, but traffic continues to thunder down the canyon on his right. The eastbound lanes curve around the mountainside; a Jersey barrier tends to obscure some oncoming vehicles. Drivers must hit the gas to get across the road quickly, while knowing that hitting rustic Squaw Peak Road too fast is also dangerous.

The site was described to experts at **Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety**, a Washington-based group. The experts' opinion jibes with what many Utah County drivers already know: This spot is death waiting to happen.

Something needs to be done, and that something is variable speed limits in the canyon. With electronic signs, vehicles approaching danger zones, such as westbound traffic just above the Sundance turnoff, could be slowed to speeds that would prevent accidents.

Some real experts -- 30 people who live in and adjacent to the canyon -- have signed a petition calling for reduced speeds. (See letter at right.) To quote a key section:

"One problem is that UDOT went the opposite direction in July of 2004 when the agency raised the speed limit from 50 to 60. Those of us who use the canyons can tell you that the average speed has increased in response to UDOT's action. Those who drive 60 mph now block traffic. During the summer motor bikes (judging by the speed with which they pass others) sometimes exceed 90 mph. Additionally, they often do this at night when visibility is reduced. Where are the speed monitors then? It often seems that we see more emergency equipment than officers controlling speed."

The more one studies the road (and you don't have to be a UDOT engineer), the more potential problems appear. For instance, UDOT has chosen cable median barriers in a number of spots, and is even adding to them. But **Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety** criticizes the barriers, saying they can "trip" an SUV and roll it over, while acting as a slingshot to fling smaller cars back into the path of other vehicles. And big trucks go slicing right through them, the group says.

Are more advanced steps needed? Clearly, yes. Illinois, Washington and Oregon have automated systems to nab speeders in work zones, like those red-light cameras that keep watch at intersections. Utah regularly boasts about its growth as a high-tech hub. Maybe it's time it looked into high-tech ways to save lives: Provo Canyon would be a great place to experiment with automated speed-law enforcement.

We call on state and county officials, including legislative leaders, to take immediate action. Lives are at stake. As you read this, drivers are roaring down the highway as others are nervously looking for ways to get on or off.

It is time for UDOT to bring some simple common sense into play.

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