

Parents who lost their daughter to a car crash on Skyway want new rails installed at the same location



Brianna Cassidy's memorial is right on the Skyway where an oncoming car jumped the median and landed on top her vehicle. Brianna's parents believe that if there had been guardrails on the inside of the road that the accident could have been prevented. Photo contributed.

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Grieving parents who have spent the last three years dealing with the death of their daughter are working to prevent fatalities along Skyway.

Rod and Mary Cassidy of Magalia lost their 19-year-old daughter, Brianna, in December 2014 when William Sanford, a driver heading up Skyway, crossed the median and hit her head-on. The California Highway Patrol investigation determined that Sanford was not on his cell phone or intoxicated, but sleep deprived and was thought to have nodded off while driving.

Accidents on the highly traveled road aren't uncommon, but the Cassidys believe that had there been a guardrail, the tragedy would have been prevented. Now, with the help of some local politicians, they are putting a plan in motion to make sure vehicles going either direction can't cross the median.

“Because this is a corner and a blind corner it’s justified to put rails up,” Rod Cassidy said.

In order to put the rails in place, the Cassidys are required to take steps which include hiring an engineer to examine the land.

While there are rails on the outside of roads, which prevents motorists from going over edges, many sections of Skyway don’t have them on the inside.

The median that Sanford crossed was only around 20 feet wide but steadily increases 5 feet in height from one side to the other. This caused his truck to become airborne and land on top of Brianna’s car.

The Cassidys have made it their mission to have guardrails installed, and are working to raise funds for surveying costs.

Butte County Public Works Director Dennis Schmidt said the road that connects Chico and Paradise can be unforgiving to motorists and does not meet current safety standards.

“Ideally, if we were to rebuild Skyway today there would be an 8-foot shoulder with more emergency areas,” he explained.

After the accident was brought to his attention, Schmidt, along with County Supervisor Doug Teeter examined the number of incidents in that particular section. Given that crossover collisions have been infrequent occurrences, Schmidt doesn’t believe that the county would be successful in attempting to secure grant funding for the project.

However, that doesn’t mean that the Cassidys’ mission is impossible. The parents have [started a foundation](#) in their daughter’s name and are searching for donations to put their plan in action.

If they were able to secure the proper funding for the project, Schmidt said their hopes could come to fruition.

“It would have to be approved by myself and the department,” he said, “There’s some locations where putting in guardrails doesn’t make sense. I could support this installation with a few caveats.”

One of the challenges that he explained is that since the two roads are at different levels, dual sets of rails would have to be installed instead of just one. Also, a plan to overlay Skyway and Cohasset Road are set for late next summer which would mean that all rails’ heights would need to be adjusted to be in accordance with the road.

If the surveying for the Cassidys’ project can be completed before the major construction begins, the director said that they could combine all the projects together.

“We are trying to wrap all the moving parts together to make a plan that makes sense,” Schmidt said.