

# Ambulances Blocked From Emergency Response By Malfunctioning CP Rail Barrier

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Lac Megantic, Quebec, on July 6, 2013 was the site of an explosion that took the lives of 47 innocent beings and wiped out a major part of the town. Since then there has been considerable propaganda about the increase in rail safety. However, what is the reality? Gorski Consulting evaluates this as a result of several recent rail safety concerns that have come to our attention. This article will address one of those concerns, relating to the malfunction of a rail crossing barricade on Clarke Road just north of Dundas Street in London, Ontario and the warning "signs" that appear to be ignored.

On September 26, 2014 we came across an unusual situation occurring at this crossing. As reported in the News page of the Gorski Consulting website, we approached the crossing travelling northbound on Clarke and while passing through the intersection of Dundas Street we observed that, several hundred metres ahead of us, the barricades for the Canadian Pacific (CP) rail crossing were lowered. This was not of initial concern until, as we came closer, it was apparent that a number of drivers were turning their vehicles around while others were driving through the barricades. In our experience such actions do not occur until drivers have been waiting for a considerable time without the appearance of a train. Figure 1 is a frame captured from the video that we took at the time that the events were unfolding. Not only were vehicles passing through the lowered barricades but pedestrians were do so as well, as shown in the video frame of Figure 2.

We waited for a prolonged time expecting that something would change, but it did not. We eventually used our cell phone to dial 911 and report the situation. Our concern was that a train might eventually show up at a time when drivers and pedestrians were of the impression that the barricades were malfunctioning and no train was expected.

It was with surprise that the dispatcher at 911 gave the indication that this was the first time she was informed of the problem even though we had been at the crossing for perhaps 25 minutes and the malfunction could have existed for an unknown time prior to our arrival. It seemed surprising to us that so many persons would be affected by this occurrence but they did nothing. Nothing except turn their vehicle around or pass through the malfunctioning barricades.

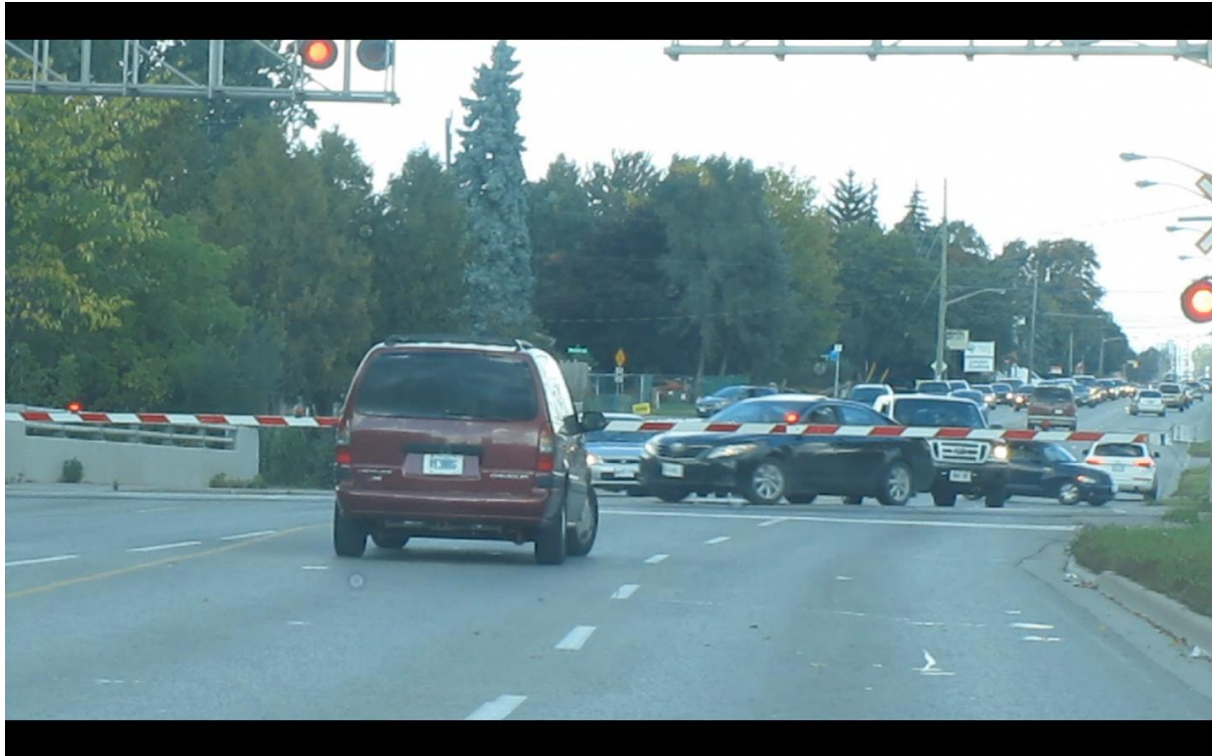


Figure 1: Frame captured from video showing vehicles passing through the lowered barricades of the CP rail crossing on Clarke Road north of Dundas Street in London, Ontario.

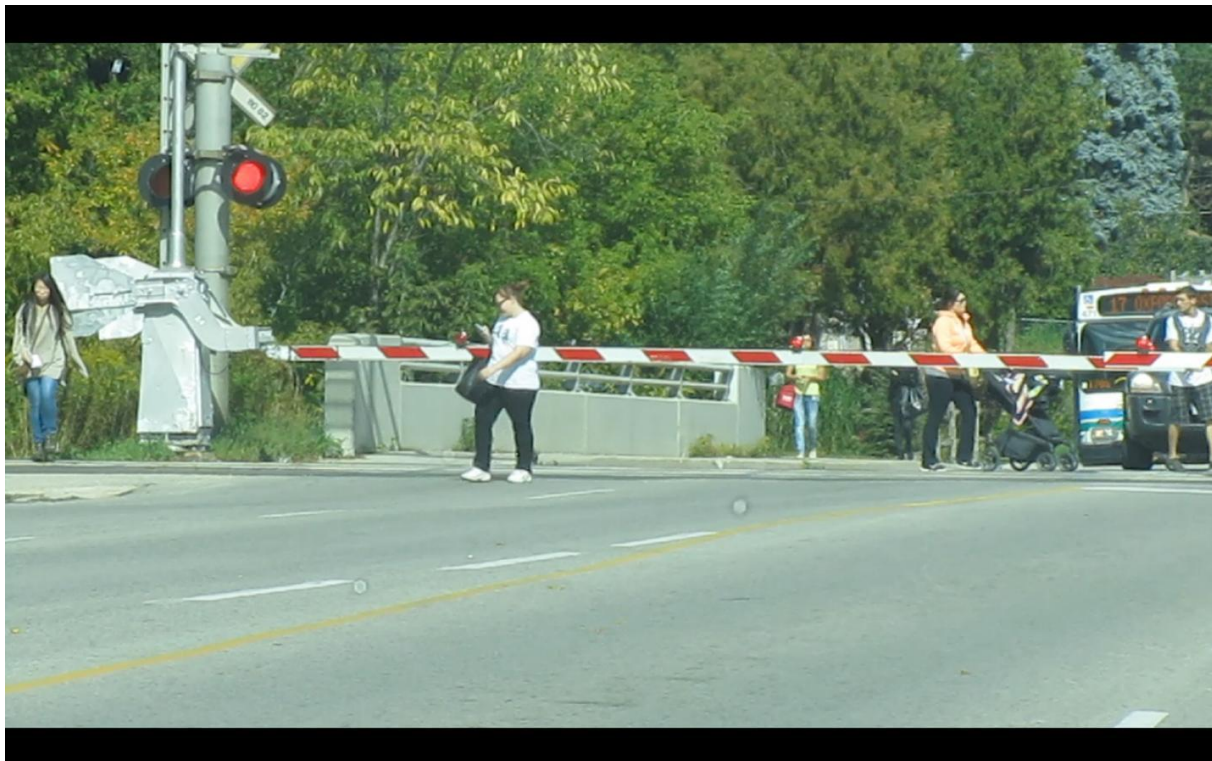
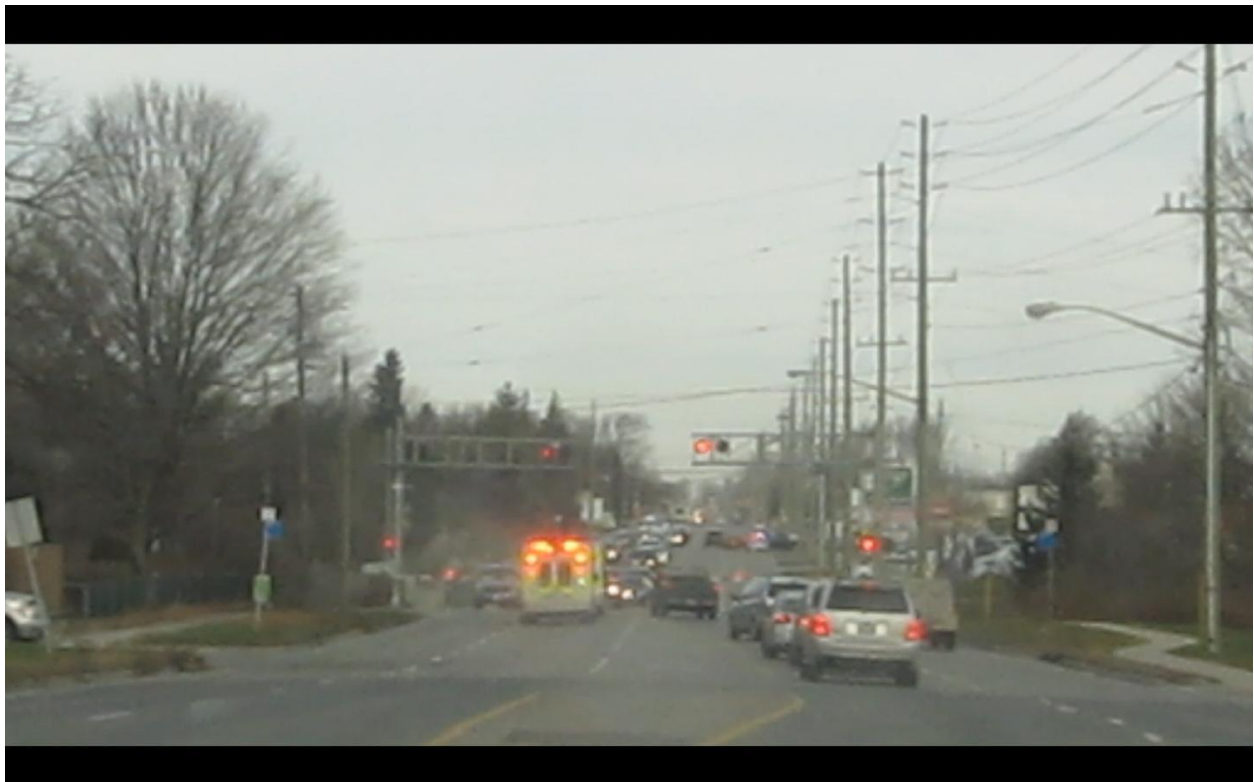


Figure 2: View of pedestrians crossing the lowered barricades.

Eventually, a CP rail vehicle arrived, an employee went into a nearby booth, a short delay occurred, and the barricades were raised. The total time that we were delayed at the crossing was about 1 hour, but again, it is unknown how much additional time expired before our arrival.

Just a little over two months passed when we encountered another incidence of the malfunctioning barricade. On the morning of December 2, 2014 we were eastbound on Dundas Street and entering the northbound, left- turn lane at Clarke Road when we observed two northbound ambulances on Clarke Road, pass through the intersection with their emergency lights activated. As we made our turn onto Clarke we, once again, observed that the barricades at the CP rail crossing were down. Yet, several hundred metres north of the crossing we observed other emergency lights, from police and fire, confirming that a collision had occurred at that location. The problem was that the two ambulances were on the south side of the lowered barricades, as shown in northward view, taken from our dash-mounted video camera, in Figure 3.



**Figure 3:** View, looking north, of the two northbound ambulances that are blocked from passing through the CP rail crossing because the barricades are lowered.

The relatively small number of northbound vehicles at the barricades were a disguise of the problem because, just like on September 26th, drivers were either turning around or driving through the lowered barricades. So the ambulance drivers were likely fooled into thinking there would be a minimal delay and that there was no malfunction. However, as one came closer to the crossing, as shown in Figure 4, it was clear that drivers were taking actions not to have to stay at the lowered barricades.



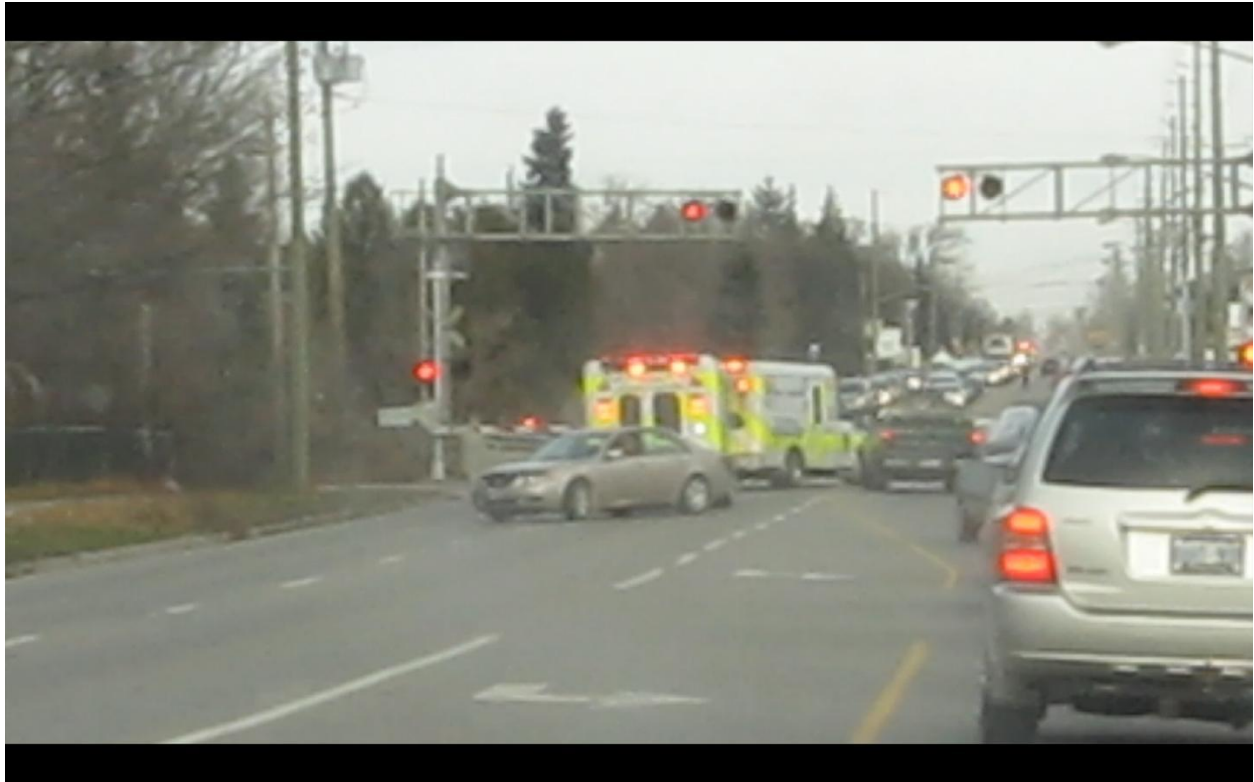


Figure 4: View showing various vehicles making u-turns or driving through the lowered barricades.

The question becomes interesting from the viewpoint of the ambulance drivers. They can see the collision site just a few hundred metres beyond the barricades. Do they attempt to travel through the downed barricades like many of the other drivers? They stop there briefly and then the first ambulance turns around and comes door-to-door with the second, as shown in Figures 5, 6 and 7. Then in Figures 8, 9 and 10 we see the ambulances speed off as they begin taking an alternate route to another rail crossing where they pass to the north side and approach the accident site from Oxford Street, southbound on Clarke.

We can be fairly certain of the route that the ambulances took (via Third Street located to the west) because of the happenings that took place after the ambulances left the area. Just a short time after the departure of the ambulances a northbound CP rail truck arrived as shown in Figure 11. The employee enters a hut (Figure 12) and a short time later the barricades are lifted (Figure 13).

We then drove northward toward the accident site as shown in Figures 14, 15 and 16. We had sufficient time to travel past the accident site and turn around in a parking lot north of the accident site, in preparation for the arrival of the two ambulances which soon appeared travelling southbound on Clarke, as shown in Figures 17 and 18.

Figures 19 and 20 show the circumstances as we returned, southbound on Clarke, to view the arrival of the two ambulances.

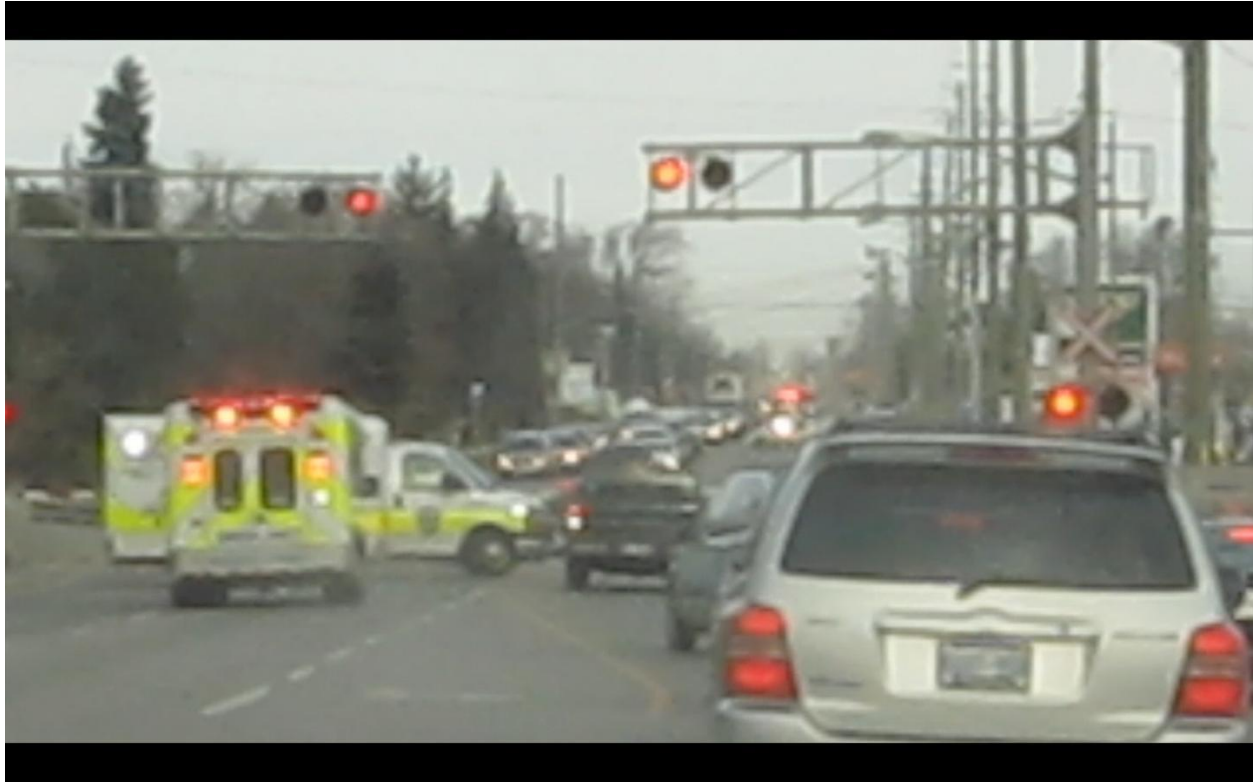


Figure 5: View of first ambulance making a three-point turn.



Figure 6: View of first ambulance turning around to approach the second ambulance.



Figure 7: A brief discussion ensues between the two ambulance drivers.

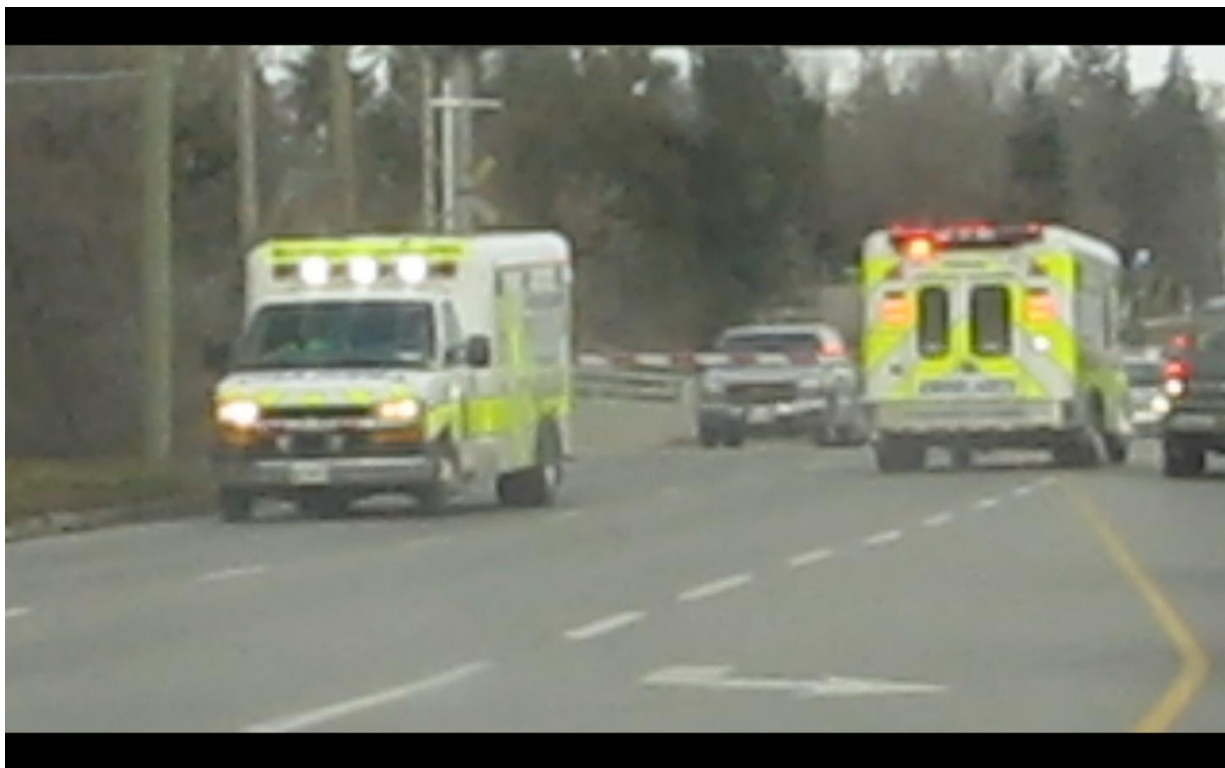


Figure 8: The First ambulance speeds off southbound on Clarke to an alternate crossing while the second ambulance also prepares to turn around.





Figure 9: View of second ambulance turning around.

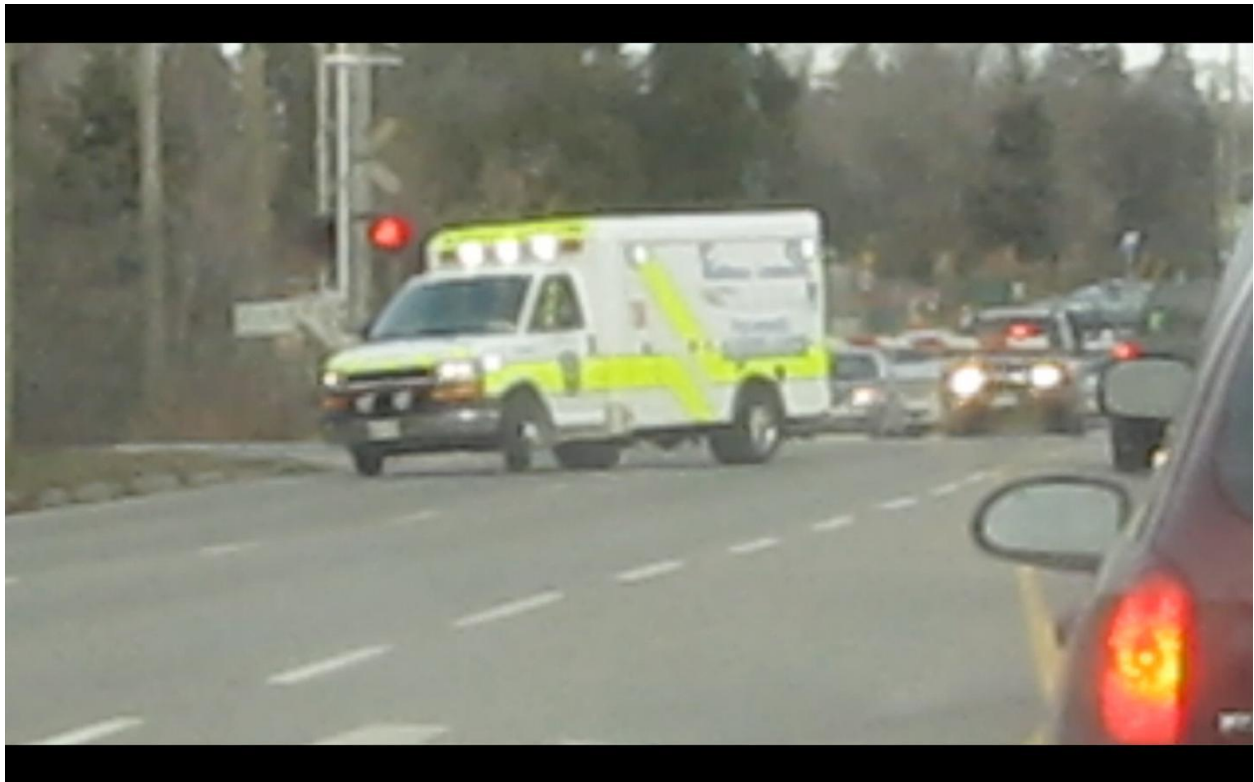


Figure 10: View of second ambulance leaving the crossing, heading southbound to another rail crossing.



Figure 11: Shortly after the ambulances depart a northbound CP rail truck arrives.



Figure 12: CP employee enters the hut adjacent to the rail crossing.





Figure 13: A short time after the CP employee enters the hut, the barricades are lifted.



Figure 14: View, looking north, showing the events at the accident site just a few hundred metres north of the CP rail crossing.



Figure 15: A grey pick-up truck is visible on the cross street while a damaged red Chevrolet car is shown in the northbound lanes of Clarke Road.

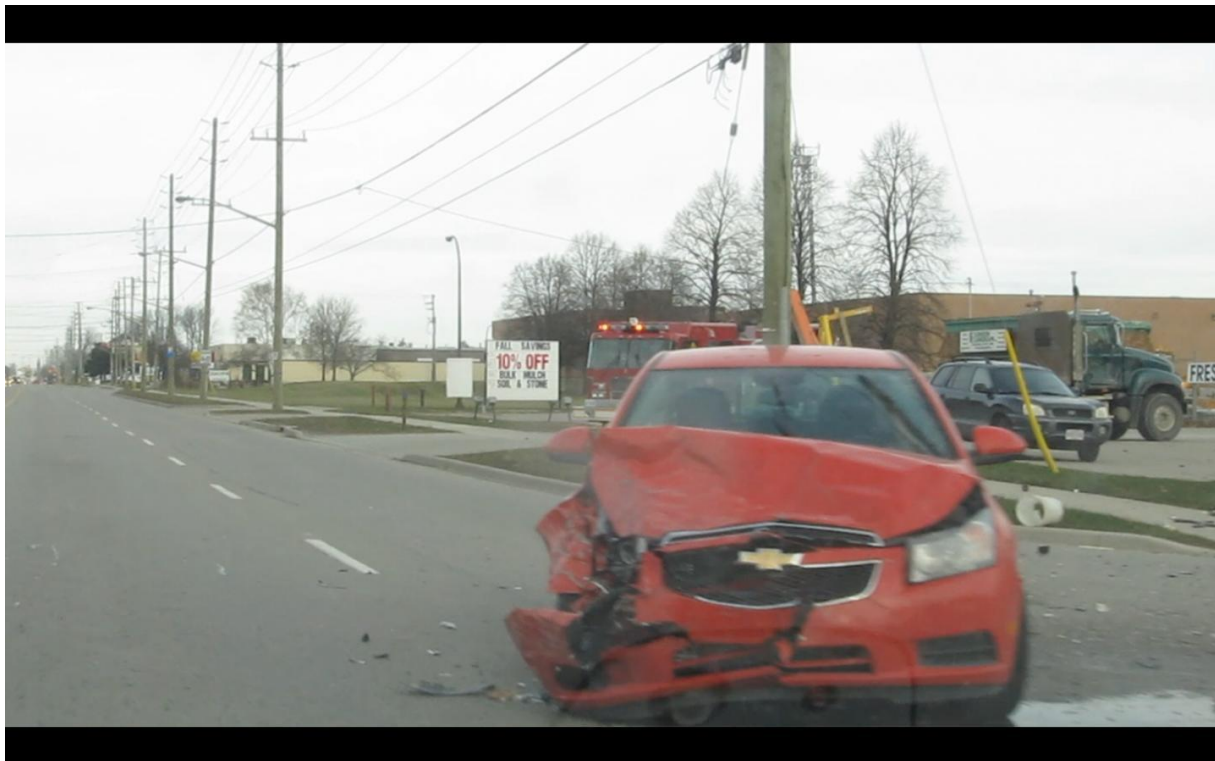


Figure 16: Damage to the red Chevrolet indicates that this collision was not inconsequential and could, potentially, have resulted in significant injuries if the circumstances became unfavourable.



Figure 17: Upon waiting a short time in a parking lot on the west side of Clarke, north of the accident site, the two ambulances arrived travelling southbound toward the accident site.

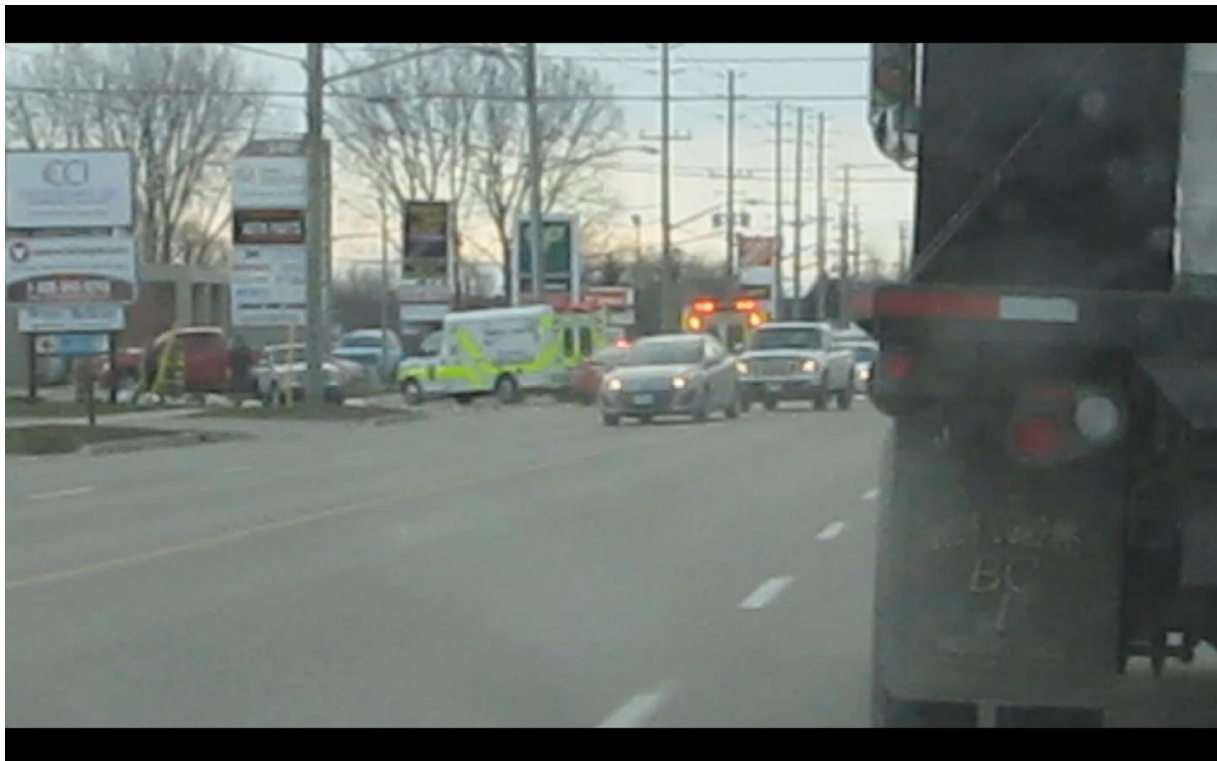


Figure 18: View, looking south, at the two southbound ambulances finally arriving at the accident site.



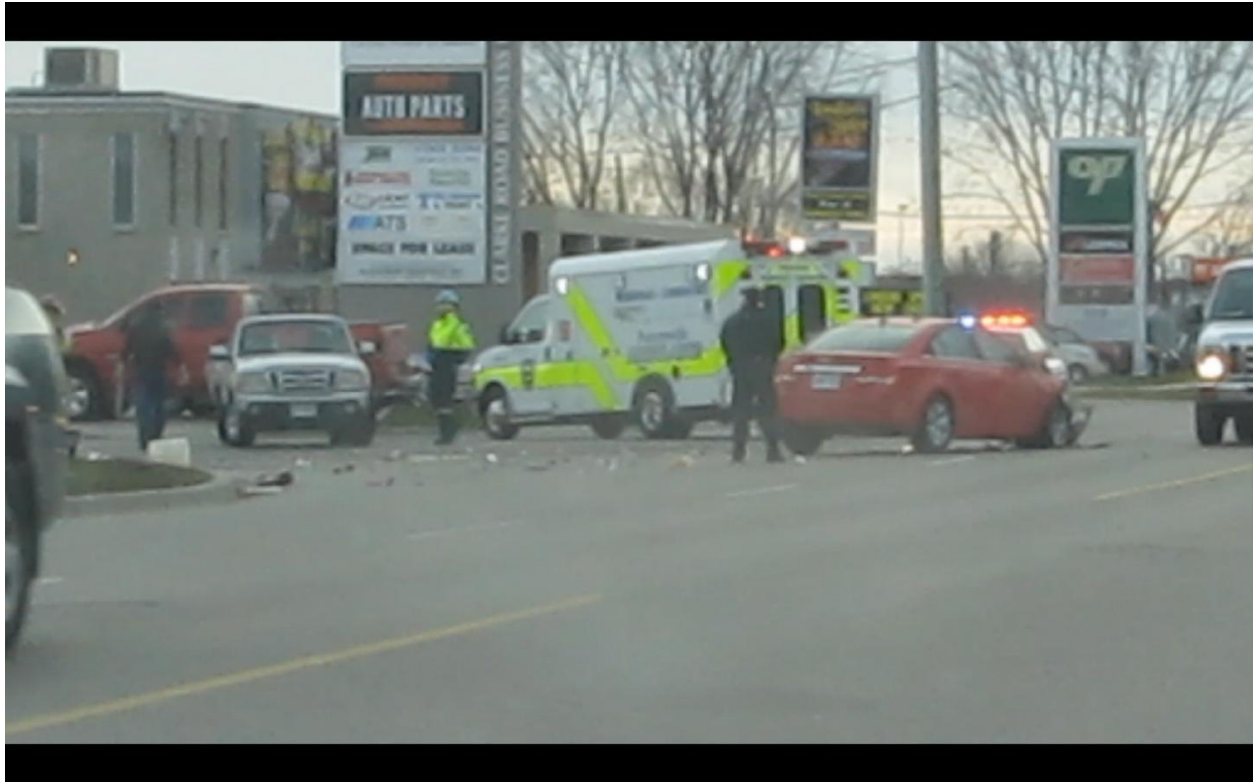


Figure 19: View of the circumstances upon the arrival of the ambulances.

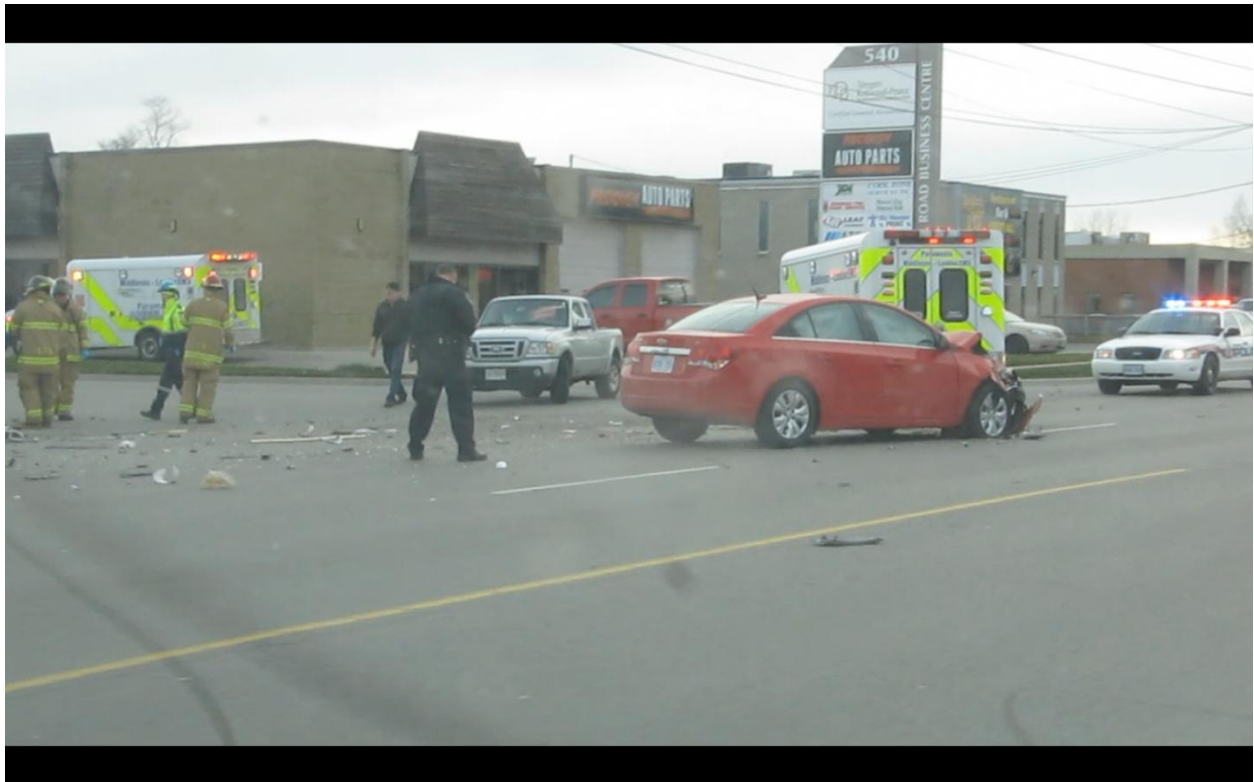


Figure 20: View of the circumstances upon the arrival of the ambulances.

The facts, as we observed them, are that the two ambulances were delayed significantly by the malfunction at the CP rail crossing. This was not the first malfunction of these barricades as evidenced by our previous reporting of the incident of September 26, 2014.

Although we have no official information about the consequences of the collision of December 2nd, we suspect the occupants of these vehicles should not have sustained major injuries. However, the variability of such incidents means that on infrequent occasions persons involved in such collision can sustain major injuries that can require immediate medical attention. Delay of ambulance attendance is not a minor matter.

A number of disasters could have stemmed from this occurrence. As in the September 26th incident, drivers or pedestrians crossing through the lowered barricades could have been struck by an approaching train or other rail vehicle. In the chaos of vehicles making U-turns and other unusual actions other collisions could have occurred.

The collision the December 2nd could potentially have been more severe. Complications such as the involvement of an elderly or other fragile occupant could make matters much different. You simply cannot expect that favourable outcomes will continue to occur like a gambler at a Los Vegas casino. Eventually something much more unfavourable will occur, much like the Lac Megantic disaster, because no one took the warning signs for what they were.

Most surprising is the attitude. The general public, police, fire, ambulance attendants, they all saw what we saw. Where is the wake-up call that says to someone that malfunctioning rail barricades cannot be ignored.

Gorski Consulting  
London, Ontario, Canada

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