



# National Transportation Safety Board

Washington, DC 20594

## Highway Accident Brief

### Fatal Pedestrian Collision with Car Capitol Heights, Maryland, July 20, 2016

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<b>Accident Number:</b>	HWY16SH021
<b>Accident Type:</b>	Fatal pedestrian collision with car
<b>Location:</b>	Central Avenue (State Route 214) at entrance to Addison Road Metrorail station, Capitol Heights, Maryland
<b>Date and Time:</b>	July 20, 2016, about 4:19 p.m. eastern daylight time
<b>Vehicle:</b>	2015 Volkswagen Jetta
<b>Driver:</b>	19-year-old female
<b>Pedestrian:</b>	18-year-old male
<b>Fatalities:</b>	1

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### Crash Description

On Wednesday, July 20, 2016, about 4:19 p.m., a 2015 Volkswagen Jetta occupied by a 19-year-old female driver and a 17-year-old male passenger was eastbound on Central Avenue (State Route 214) near the Addison Road Metrorail (Metro) station in Capitol Heights, Prince George's County, Maryland. Meanwhile, an 18-year-old male pedestrian had crossed the eastbound lanes of Central Avenue and was standing in a crosswalk on the median that separates the opposing lanes of travel. As the driver approached the median, she lost control of her vehicle, which traveled onto the median and struck a traffic sign, a concrete raised curb, the pedestrian, a pedestrian warning sign, and a barrier fence along the north side of the median (figure 1). The vehicle then left the median, continued about 200 feet east, crossing all westbound lanes of Central Avenue, and came to final rest on the sidewalk.

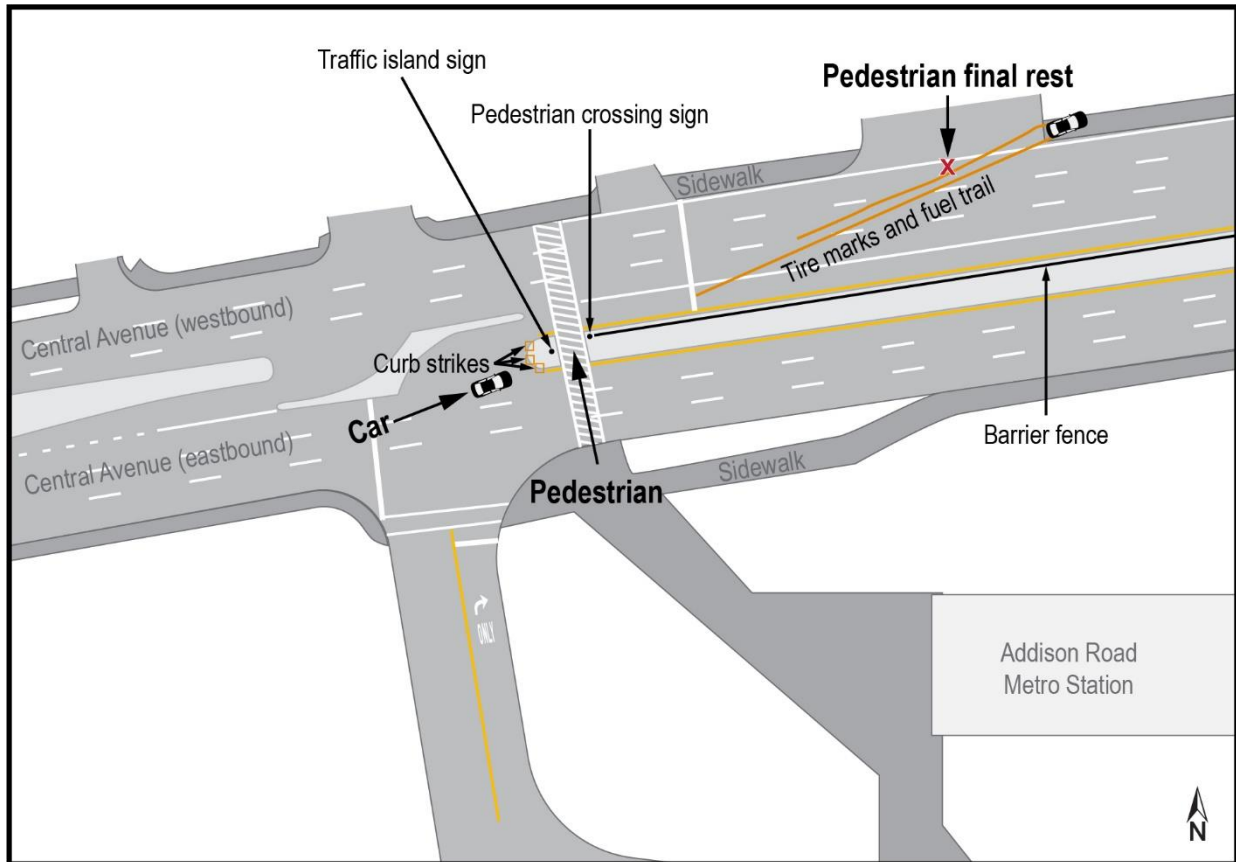
According to the Maryland police report, the pedestrian was dragged by the car into the westbound lanes. A Metro transit police officer who was in the station's parking lot responded and summoned the fire department. The pedestrian was pronounced dead at the scene.

The temperature at the time of the crash was 82.4°F, winds were from the north at 4.6 mph, and skies were mostly cloudy.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Weather data from <https://www.wunderground.com/history/>.

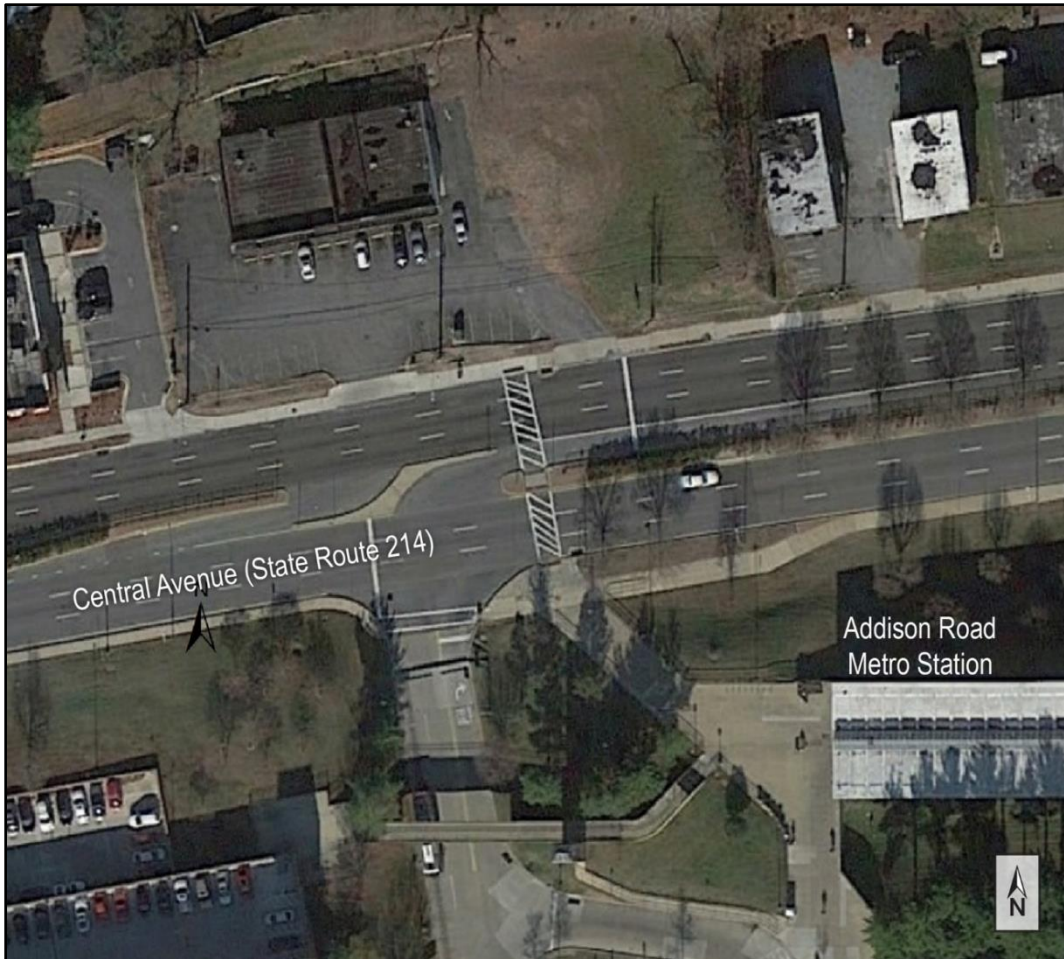
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**Figure 1.** Diagram of crash scene showing crosswalk on Central Avenue, car's path, pedestrian's path on crosswalk and final rest position, and Addison Road Metro station.

### Crash Location

The crash occurred in the 6400 block of Central Avenue near the entrance to the Addison Road Metro station (figure 2). In the vicinity, Central Avenue is a main traffic artery in the urban unincorporated community of Capitol Heights. The roadway is asphalt and consists of three eastbound and three westbound through lanes of travel. The opposing lanes are separated by a 10-foot-wide raised concrete median. A barrier fence is mounted on the north side of the median. The left eastbound lane of travel is bordered by a turn lane, and the right eastbound lane intersects a road leading to the Addison Road station, controlled by a stop sign for exiting cars. The posted speed limit on Central Avenue is 30 mph.



**Figure 2.** Aerial view of crash site showing pedestrian crosswalk on Central Avenue where crash occurred and Addison Road Metro station (lower right). Paved walkway leads from south side of crosswalk to station entrance. (Base photo by Google Earth)

The left westbound through lane of Central Avenue is bordered by a left-turn lane into the road to the Metro station lot. Each through lane is about 11 feet wide and is delineated by a broken white line. The outer edges of the roadway are bordered by concrete curbs and sidewalks. The 12-foot-wide crosswalk where the crash occurred is immediately north of the walkway to the station entrance and extends 91 feet across Central Avenue. The crosswalk has no vehicle or pedestrian control signals. Traffic at the intersection of Addison Road and Central Avenue, a block west of the crosswalk, is controlled by signals that include pedestrian phases. The nearest traffic signal east of the crosswalk is a half mile away.

## Pedestrian

The pedestrian lived about a mile from the crash site. Before the crash, he had crossed the eastbound lanes of Central Avenue and was standing in the crosswalk on the median. The pedestrian was wearing black shoes, camouflage shorts, and a white T-shirt. A video of the crash sequence from a nearby surveillance camera shows that he was facing the westbound traffic as he

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waited to continue crossing the road. There is no indication that the pedestrian was using his cell phone when the crash occurred.

A postmortem examination of the pedestrian was conducted by the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner in Maryland. The examiner recorded the pedestrian as 6 feet 1 inch tall and weighing 168 pounds.<sup>2</sup> A toxicological blood analysis was negative for alcohol and other drugs. The autopsy report stated that the pedestrian sustained significant injuries, including severe head and neck injuries, an aortic transection, multiple rib fractures, and other lacerations, contusions, and abrasions. The autopsy listed the cause of death as blunt force trauma to the head.

### Driver

The driver was unlicensed. When questioned by police investigators at the crash scene, the driver stated that she was a passenger in the car. The passenger, who was also the vehicle owner, identified himself as the driver. However, a motoring witness observed the car before and during the crash and stated that the female was the driver. When presented with this information in a later interview, the male admitted that he was the passenger and the female was the driver.

After the crash, police investigators observed the driver. She displayed no signs of being under the influence of an intoxicant or any symptoms of a medical condition. No toxicological tests were conducted. According to the driver's cell phone records, she was not talking or texting at the time of the crash.

### Vehicle

The vehicle involved in the crash, a 2015 Volkswagen Jetta four-door passenger car, was examined at the scene. The driver and front-seat passenger air bags deployed in the crash. The center leading edge of the hood showed contact damage, with the top of the hood crushed downward (figure 3). The grill was cracked, and the outer front bumper cover had contact damage. Both front tires had ruptured, and both front tires and the outer edge of the wheels showed contact damage. The right front fender had minor contact damage, and scrapes and scratches were noted along the painted surface of the vehicle's right side. The front windshield appeared to be undamaged.

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<sup>2</sup> Pedestrian characteristics, such as height and weight, were documented to aid crash reconstruction and evaluate pedestrian injuries.

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**Figure 3.** Photograph of crash car showing contact damage to hood. Inflated passenger air bag is visible behind windshield.

After the crash, police investigators downloaded data from the vehicle's air bag control module (ACM). The ACM recorded data from several sensors, indicating that the Volkswagen had a frontal crash that caused the driver and front-passenger air bags to deploy. Five seconds before the crash, the vehicle was traveling forward at 58 mph, according to the ACM data. The data also indicate that in the 0.25 second following the crash, the car accelerated while veering to the left at about 6 mph. The car's brake switch was not activated before the crash. During the crash, the driver was restrained by a lap/shoulder belt, and the passenger was unbelted.

### Applicable Traffic Laws

The Transportation Article of the Code of Maryland regulates the movement of pedestrians and motor vehicles on public roadways. State law requires that pedestrians obey pedestrian control signals when present (Title 21, section 501). At intersections with traffic control signals, pedestrians may cross the roadway only in a marked crosswalk (section 21-503[c]). In this crash, the pedestrian entered the roadway while in a marked crosswalk that had no vehicle or pedestrian control signals.

Maryland law requires drivers to yield to a pedestrian in a marked crosswalk (section 21-502[e]). The law also requires drivers to "exercise due care to avoid colliding with any pedestrian," including sounding a horn as a warning (21-504). Under the law's basic speed rule, "A person may not drive a vehicle on a highway that exceeds [the specified] limits" ( 21-801.1).

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The transportation code specifically prohibits drivers from driving other than on the right-hand roadway (21-311.1), driving over a barrier on a divided highway (21-311.2), driving on the median strip of a divided highway (21-311.3), driving without a license (165-101[a]), and driving recklessly “in wanton or willful disregard for the safety of persons and property” (21-901.1[a]) or “in a careless or imprudent manner that endangers any property or the life or person of any individual” (21-901.1[b]). In addition, the transportation code prohibits a person from giving “any information that he knows or has reason to believe is false in any oral or written report” required by the law (20-108).

### Video of Crash Sequence

A video of the crash sequence was captured by a surveillance camera on a building at the Metro station. The camera faced Central Avenue and captured a distant view of the roadway. In the recording, the pedestrian can be seen entering the crosswalk from the south side of Central Avenue. The pedestrian reaches the median and stops, facing the westbound traffic. When the passenger car enters the video frame, the vehicle has left the roadway and traveled onto the median. The vehicle collides with a sign, the pedestrian, and a barrier fence. The vehicle comes to rest outside the video frame. A video analysis by the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) Office of Research and Engineering estimated that the crash vehicle was traveling at 55 mph.<sup>3</sup>

### Driver Statement

In a written statement to police investigators the day of the crash, the driver said that she was a passenger in the car when the crash occurred. She stated that while her car was traveling on Addison Road, a black sport utility vehicle in the adjacent right lane encroached into the lane occupied by her car and forced it to the left. Her car struck a raised concrete curb, which caused a loss of control and then the crash. The driver stated that she did not see the pedestrian until after the crash and could not estimate how fast her vehicle was moving.

During an interview by officers from the Prince George’s County Police Department, the driver denied using alcohol or drugs before the crash. When presented with information that witnesses had identified her as the driver in the crash, she declined to make further statements to police, citing her constitutional right against self-incrimination.

### Passenger Statement

In a written statement to police investigators the day of the crash, the passenger said that he was driving the car. He said that he was traveling eastbound on Central Avenue in the far left lane when a truck came into his lane, causing him to drive to the left and strike a median in the roadway. He described the truck as a sport utility vehicle but could not describe its color. He stated that he was traveling 45 to 50 mph.

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<sup>3</sup> The speed estimate is accurate to  $\pm 4$  mph. For more information, see the *Video Study Report* in the docket for this investigation.

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On August 1, 2016, the passenger was confronted with information that witnesses had identified him as a passenger in the vehicle. The passenger stated that before the crash, he felt ill and allowed his girlfriend to drive him to the hospital. As he was riding, he began to feel worse and made an unusual noise. His girlfriend, the driver, became concerned and while checking on him, took her eyes off the road. The vehicle then drove off the road, struck a fence on the median, and came to rest on the opposite side of the roadway. The passenger said he then saw that the car had struck a pedestrian.

### Probable Cause

The National Transportation Safety Board determines that the probable cause of the crash in Capitol Heights, Maryland, was the unlicensed driver's excessive speed and failure to maintain control of the car so as to avoid colliding with the pedestrian.

## BY THE NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

**ROBERT L. SUMWALT, III**  
Chairman

**EARL F. WEENER**  
Member

**T. BELLA DINH-ZARR**  
Member

**Adopted:** July 2, 2018

For more details about this accident, visit the [NTSB public docket](#) and search for NTSB accident ID HWY16SH021. The accident dockets include such information as police reports, photographs, driver and witness statements, data on previous crashes, highway engineering reports, and timing of traffic signals.

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The NTSB does not assign fault or blame for an accident or incident; rather, as specified by NTSB regulation, “accident/incident investigations are fact-finding proceedings with no formal issues and no adverse parties . . . and are not conducted for the purpose of determining the rights or liabilities of any person.” 49 *Code of Federal Regulations*, Section 831.4. Assignment of fault or legal liability is not relevant to the NTSB’s statutory mission to improve transportation safety by investigating accidents and incidents and issuing safety recommendations. In addition, statutory language prohibits the admission into evidence or use of any part of an NTSB report related to an accident in a civil action for damages resulting from a matter mentioned in the report. 49 *United States Code*, Section 1154(b).

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