

Passengers watch as train slams into SUV

Journalist witnesses horrific scene Thursday

York Region Newspaper Group reporter Teresa Latchford witnessed an SUV being struck by a train Thursday morning. Here is her account.

BY TERESA LATCHFORD
Staff Writer

Slowing for a railway crossing on Vivian Road, other motorists watched as a grey BMW SUV crossed the tracks and was hit by a passenger train.

There were no barrier arms, but the red warning lights were flashing.

Seemingly in slow motion, the SUV was pushed along the track by a VIA train as struggling to stop.

The vehicle finally fell off the tracks and landed in a nearby ditch after what seemed an eternity for horrified onlookers.

The impact caused the vehicle to scatter its contents; a pair of eyeglasses, bits of shredded interior and loose papers covered the patch of Whitchurch-Stouffville road between Kennedy and McCowan roads.

The scene was chaotic as train personnel and a doctor rushed to the car to see who was on board.

Mortified passengers pressed their faces against windows near their seats to see what was going on.

Emergency personnel flew in and worked quickly to control the situation. After being pulled from the mangled BMW, a male driver was airlifted to hospital with non-life threatening injuries.

The railway crossing hasn't been the site of many accidents, Whitchurch-Stouffville Mayor Sue Sherban said, but the town will study results of a York Regional Police investigation to see if council should push for safety improvements.

"If it was driver error, there is not much we can do," Ms Sherban said. "But if it was some malfunction, it will be taken to council."

Crossing arms are installed on every new or renovated railway crossing in Whitchurch-Stouffville, she added.

However, unless there are previous or ongoing problems at one particular crossing, it is not seen as warranted. Installing arms at a crossing can be quite costly.

"On Aurora Road, there was a fatality that warranted putting arms at the crossing," she said.

"But we will just have to see what happened and what kind of safety measures we can lobby for."



STAFF PHOTO/BILL ROBERTS

A tow truck driver rolls a wheel found about 100 metres east of where an SUV was hit by a train on Vivian Road Thursday morning. The driver was airlifted to hospital with non-life-threatening injuries. The wheel was loaded on to the flatbed with the rest of the car. Whitchurch-Stouffville Mayor Sue Sherban said the town will review the accident report to decide if improvements are needed at the train crossing.

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