



PRELIMINARY REPORT

HIGHWAY

HWY20FH007

The information in this report is preliminary and will be supplemented or corrected during the course of the investigation.

On Wednesday, July 1, 2020, at 9:44 a.m. (eastern daylight time), a Charleston County sheriff's deputy stopped his 2017 Dodge Charger patrol vehicle in the far-right westbound lane of Interstate 526 (I-526) on the Don N. Holt bridge, which carries traffic over the Cooper River in North Charleston, Charleston County, South Carolina. I-526 consists of three westbound lanes and three eastbound lanes divided by a concrete jersey barrier. The westbound approach to the bridge has an ascending 4 percent grade until it reaches the through-truss part of the bridge deck, where it levels off as it spans the Cooper River (figure 1). The road has a posted speed limit of 60 mph.



Figure 1. Westbound view on I-526 approaching crash location.

The sheriff's deputy had parked his patrol car on the bridge, with its warning lights activated, behind a disabled 2005 Porsche sport utility vehicle (SUV) that was partially blocking the right lane and shoulder of westbound I-526. Moments later, a tow truck arrived, activated its warning lights, and parked in front of the disabled vehicle. The tow truck driver left his vehicle and stood on the right shoulder with his back to the bridge parapet (which was 2 feet 8 inches high) and began tending to the SUV. The driver of the disabled vehicle got out of the car and stood in the road to speak to the tow truck driver. The deputy exited his vehicle and told the SUV driver to return to the safety of his car.

At 9:50 a.m., a 2018 Ford F350 pickup truck with an attached unladen trailer was traveling west in the right lane of I-526, approaching the blocked lanes. The truck, which was engaged in a commercial interstate trip, struck the rear of the parked patrol vehicle, pushing it into the deputy. The patrol car continued forward into the rear of the disabled SUV. The SUV was pushed forward and across all three travel lanes, coming to rest on the left shoulder next to the center barrier. The driver of the SUV, who had reentered his vehicle before the collision, was uninjured. The pickup truck continued to push the patrol car forward, eventually striking the tow truck driver, who was thrown off the bridge and into the river below. The patrol car struck the rear of the parked tow truck before coming to final rest. The deputy sustained serious injuries, and the tow truck driver was fatally injured. The driver of the pickup truck was uninjured.



Figure 2. Pickup truck at final rest on top of patrol car. Flatbed tow truck is visible in background. (Source: Charleston County Sheriff's Office)

The National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) continues to gather information on the actions of the driver of the pickup truck leading to the crash, the commercial operation of the pickup truck, and highway issues. All aspects of the crash remain under investigation as the NTSB determines the probable cause, with the intent of issuing safety recommendations to prevent similar crashes. The NTSB is working alongside the Charleston County Sheriff's Office and the South Carolina Highway Patrol, which are conducting a separate, parallel investigation.