

O'Hare pedestrian safety studied

Fences, higher curbs considered following fatal accident

By Richard Jones
and Cameron McWhirter

The city is considering several safety measures, including fences and higher curbs, at the departure and arrival areas at O'Hare International Airport, Chicago aviation officials said Monday.

The options were discussed during a two-hour meeting Monday between traffic experts, city officials and police. The meeting was prompted by an accident at the airport on Sunday, in which a 22-year-old man was killed and four others were injured when a car jumped the curb and rammed into bystanders.

"There are different things that could be done," said city Aviation Commissioner David Mosena. "We don't know which ones, if any of them, will enhance safety."

Mayor Richard Daley said city officials will continue to discuss ways to reduce traffic accidents at O'Hare, but flippantly offered another solution. "You could put 12-foot walls out there," the mayor said.

Mosena said he felt O'Hare was safe already, but added, "the question is whether we can make it safer." He said officials would have to weigh the possible side effects of any improved safety measures.

"For every solution to security on the sidewalk there is an impact on the roadway," Mosena said. "So you have to look at what accident likelihood could be created by that solution. You could solve one problem and create a bigger problem on the other side of the coin."

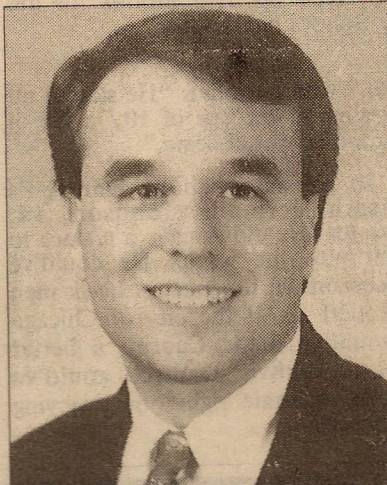
Mosena said he knew of no other metropolitan airports that used railings or other types of barriers at terminal entrances.

George Brinkman, 68, of Elgin, had started to pull a mini-van away from the curb at the United Airlines terminal departure area around noon Sunday when the van jumped the curb and plowed into bystanders, luggage and cars.

David Simon, 22, of Deerfield, was killed. Four others were treated and released from area hospitals.

Lora Schwarz, 40, described the accident Monday from her Palatine home, where she was recuperating from injuries to her arms, legs and hips.

She said she had just dropped off her husband, Arthur, at work at



AP photo

David Simon, 22, of Deerfield, was killed when a van drove on the sidewalk at O'Hare.

United when Brinkman slammed into her car. After she was treated at a hospital, Schwarz said she found Simon's jacket in her shattered car.

"Just in the wrong place and the wrong time, I guess," she said. "But it really does make me mad. To find the kid's jacket in my car, well that just made me feel even worse. It's scary."

Arthur Schwarz, 43, a baggage handler, said he had just kissed his wife goodbye when he heard the screeching of Brinkman's van. He turned to see the van barreling down the sidewalk.

"He was wide awake," Schwarz

said of Brinkman. "His eyes were as wide as plates and he was flaying his arms at the steering wheel like he was trying to steer a steamship."

Brinkman was charged with two misdemeanors, driving on a sidewalk and negligent driving. But officials are examining the mini-van for mechanical problems, Mosena said.

Monday afternoon, Michelle Karamanlis, 29, who was waiting by the United terminal with her husband and 9-month-old daughter, said she felt threatened and thought something more should be done to prevent another tragedy.

Eleven months ago, a motorist drove through a group of schoolchildren at the airport, killing a 9-year-old.

"With all these cars flying through, I think they should set up barriers or fences or something," she said.

Simon had driven his sister to the airport so she could return to school in Kansas. News of his death shocked those at Bradley University in Peoria, where Simon studied advertising and graduated in December.

Jack Fought, a creative advertising professor, said Simon was a straight-A student in the class.

"He carried himself well," Fought said. "He was clean-cut. You felt there was no limit to what a kid like that could do."

Tribune reporters John Kass and Jerry Thornton contributed to this article.

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