

# Wrecks/Researchers look at new methods of flagging dangers

From 1A

Typically, state engineers make changes in high-accident locations — adding signs, road stripes or a traffic signal, for example — after the area has experienced a set level of serious accidents.

What Tian and colleagues are looking into is whether other indicators could warn that a location has high potential for accidents, possibly justifying changes before wrecks occur.

In the “crash surrogates study,” researchers are studying and videotaping roads and intersections across the Truckee Meadows, with an emphasis on stretches of the McCarran loop.

They’re looking for things like numbers of tire marks — a sign that a given place might be prone to fender-benders. They’re also asking motorists what they think through interviews at places like the Department of Motor Vehicles and an online survey.

“I think everybody has ideas about particular locations, and that’s what we want to gather,” graduate student L.J. Johnson said.

## A resident’s opinion

Al Mooers has lived in Reno for 13 years and feels safer driving here than at his former home in Southern California. Still, there are places where he’s uneasy behind the wheel.

“Downtown is a mess always,” Mooers said. He doesn’t care for entering U.S. 395 from Da-

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monte Ranch Parkway, either.

“It’s just the merging, cars coming, lights changing,” Mooers said.

## Forecasting

Once data is collected regarding potential hazards at particular locations, that information will be matched with actual accident statistics to be tested for validity. That will, in turn, determine whether future accident forecasts can be reliably made, researchers said.

“It’s very similar to trying to forecast a storm or disaster,” Tian said. “Here, it’s trying to forecast accidents.”

Places where there are a lot of accidents because of high traffic can be particularly difficult and expensive to fix, Tian said. But he hopes this system might point out problems at locations that could be fixed relatively easily and cheaply, avoiding future accidents.

NDOT’s Law said it remains to be seen how effective the system might be.

“I think it’s something we have to try,” Law said. “The alternative is just to keep collecting data after accidents occur, and that’s reactive. I’m hopeful.”

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