

# A Dangerous Road “Just Around the Corner”

By Emily Bolman

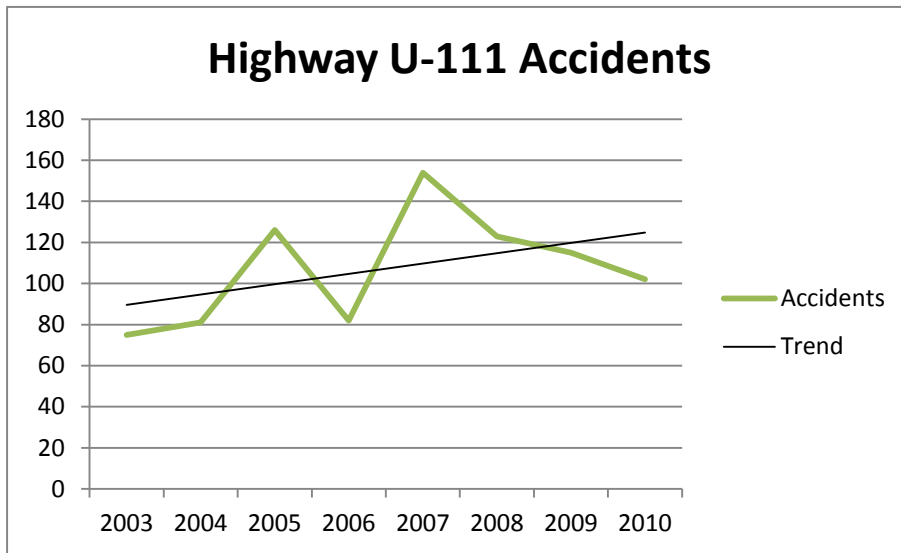


Yungas Road – Bolivia ([travelsfy.com](http://travelsfy.com))

Bolivia’s Yungas Road is the deadliest road in the world claiming up to 300 lives annually, according to Gracie Murano. The road is carved out of sheer cliffs stretching from La Paz to Coroico. Narrow lanes, mud slides and falling rocks are what make this road so dangerous. The chances of encountering a road like this one in the United States are very slim; nevertheless there are many roads in America that take many lives as well. In the U.S. Census Bureau 2012 Statistical Abstract there were 35,900 automobile fatalities in 2009. John Horsley, the executive director of American Association of State

Highway and Transportation Officials, said that 60 percent of fatalities take place on rural two-lane roads. The main causes of these fatalities are blind curves, bad grading, a lack of center or side barriers and steep slopes (Greenberg). Looking outside my front window I see a highway that meets a majority of these criteria.

Highway U-111, also known as Bacchus Highway, curves along the Oquirrh Mountains from Herriman to Magna Utah where it meets up with Interstate 80. Less than a decade ago it was surrounded by corn fields and tumble weeds, but now it is sprawling with high density communities on both sides of its landscape and yet the road remains the same with only a few



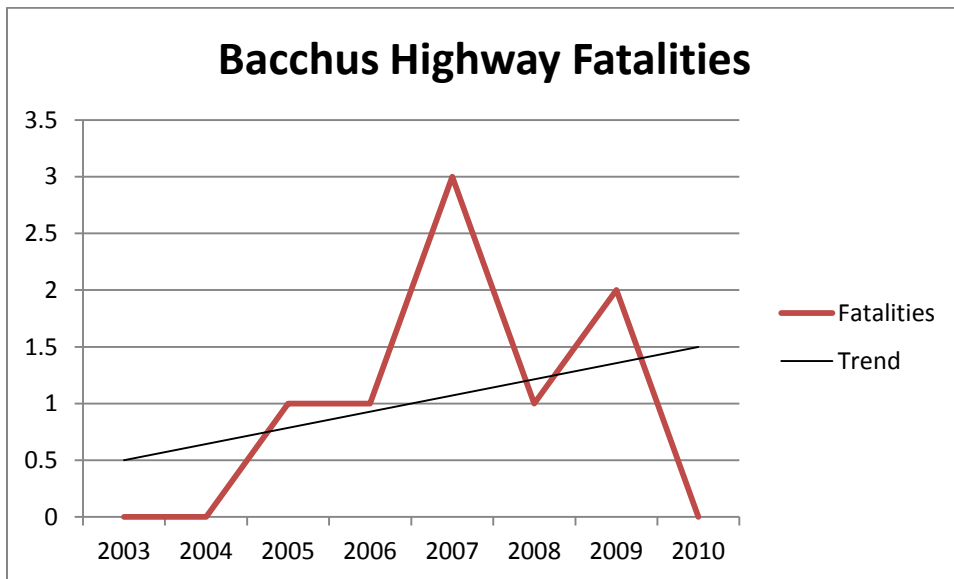
safety improvements made recently. There is no center lane, side barriers or shoulder. It has steep grades, blind curves and blind intersections. Gary Mower, the Utah

Department of Public Safety Research Analyst, said that in the last eight years there have been 858 accidents on Highway U-111 and eight of them were fatal. In the past eight years, numbers have grown by 38 percent. In 2006 there was a significant decrease in the amount of accidents. Mower reasoned that this decrease was because the procedure for filing accident reports had changed, possibly causing inaccuracies resulting in artificially low numbers of accidents reported. He pointed out that the largest amount of accidents occurred in 2007 and assumed that it was because officers had become familiar with the reporting process, but also suggested that extreme weather



Highway U-111 (deseretnews.com)

conditions could have caused the increase as well. Part of U-111 goes through Magna City which drops the speed limit to 35 miles per hour, but only 40 percent of the accidents occur in that stretch of the road. Sixty percent of the accidents happen where the speed limit is between 50 and 60 MPH and most of them are more serious, causing fatalities. According to the data given by Mower the number of fatalities has an increasing trend of 300 percent over the last eight years. With Highway U-111's surroundings becoming more and more populated it is predicted that the number will continue to climb unless something is done.



In March of 2011 Alex Cabrero from *The Deseret News* reported that the Utah Department of Transportation (UDOT) claimed to have made some safety upgrades. The speed limit on the highway was lowered from 60 mph to 50 mph in some places and a traffic light has been installed at 8200 South. The department will be widening the shoulders and adding side rumble strips, but they give no completion date. Even though efforts have been made, is it enough?

In December of 2011, after these improvements were made, my neighbor, David Kenney of West Jordan, Utah died on Highway U-111 when a truck rear-ended him after he slowed down to avoid hitting a deer crossing the road. He died on the scene. Just two months later on the corner of Old Bingham Highway and Highway U-111, Melissa Stone and her two children Edward (7 months) and Ethne (2) were hit by a cement truck while making a left turn. Sara Lenz and Hunter Schwarz of the *Deseret News* reported that Melissa and her son survived, but Ethne died as a result of her injuries.



[“Two year old dies after car crash with cement truck” \(KSL.com\)](#)

Commuters are literally playing Russian roulette every time they travel down this road. Unfortunately car accidents are not the only concern that local residents have. Amy K. Stewart, from the *Deseret News*, reports that the Jordan School District of Utah cut their hazardous bus routes because of lack of budget and for the people living west of Highway U-111, this is a serious matter. Stewart says residents have nick named it “The Highway of Death.” The Jordan School District says there are plans to build a sky-bridge over the highway, but in the meantime they have placed a crossing guard at the Intersection of 8200 South and U-111. Stewart stated, “Melissa Johnson, the Mayor of West Jordan says it is not a solution, it is only putting one more

person's life in danger.” Stewart also said that city officials came up with the solution to organize carpooling, but this seems to only be a temporary fix. Apparently there are no laws that state that the government is legally responsible for making sure that kids can cross safely at intersections, but they do feel that ethically they should.

As more and more houses pop up and more and more cars travel on Highway U-111 it becomes more and more dangerous. There are plans to expand the highway and make better improvements in the future, but why aren't these improvements made as the communities are built up? It should not take family members of lost loved ones petitioning to make these roads safer to make things happen. When Gary Mower was asked why roads are not made safer in a more timely matter, he said that politics can play a big role. The Wasatch Regional Council, which is made up of elected officials, along with UDOT, decides what changes are made to the roads in the Salt Lake County. Commuters that travel along U-111 want the road to remain a commuter road keeping it at high speeds. Residents that live along this dangerous road want the road to meet their safety needs. These two conflicting desires are making progress towards a final solution extremely slow, and in the meantime lives are being lost. Mower also says that not having the money to change the road is a huge deterrent. Mayor Johnson said, “It takes one million dollars just to build a one-mile stretch of road” (Johnson). The necessary changes to make U-111 safer could just be cost prohibitive in this economy, but can you put a price on life?

As Horsley said, “60 percent of the fatal accidents in America happen on two lane rural roads.” The structures of these roads are not the only cause of these accidents. He also reports, “There are 20 states that don't have primary seatbelt laws, and there are 24 states



["25 Funny Church Signs and 1 Stupid One" Marketing Jesus.net](#)

that don't have anything on the books to discourage either texting while driving or talking on your cell phone." In my interview, Mower also implied that drivers are less attentive than before and that there are more things to distract them. It's not just city planners and residents that should be held responsible for these problems, but drivers should be held accountable as well. It is going to take everyone working together to come up with a solution that will improve the safety of not only Highway U-111, but of all roads everywhere.

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