

ON THE SCENE

A Fatal Lack of Attention

by Trooper Troy Briggs, Washington State Patrol

Editor's note—Friction Zone draws no conclusions and assumes no liability for conclusions drawn by the reader. This report may be graphic in nature and may not be suitable for all readers.

SPRING IN THE PACIFIC Northwest found this 25-year-old male rider enjoying a sunny afternoon at the beginning of the riding season. The rider was traveling northbound on a four-lane highway (posted speed limit of 50 mph) that is divided by a two-way center turn lane. Traffic in the area was moderate. Along this highway there are multiple side streets on both sides that are controlled by stop signs at the intersections.

Sequence

The rider was traveling northbound in the left lane at the posted speed limit and maintaining his own lane. He was following traffic that was a substantial distance ahead of him. A driver of a ¾-ton Ford van was traveling east on a side street and approach-

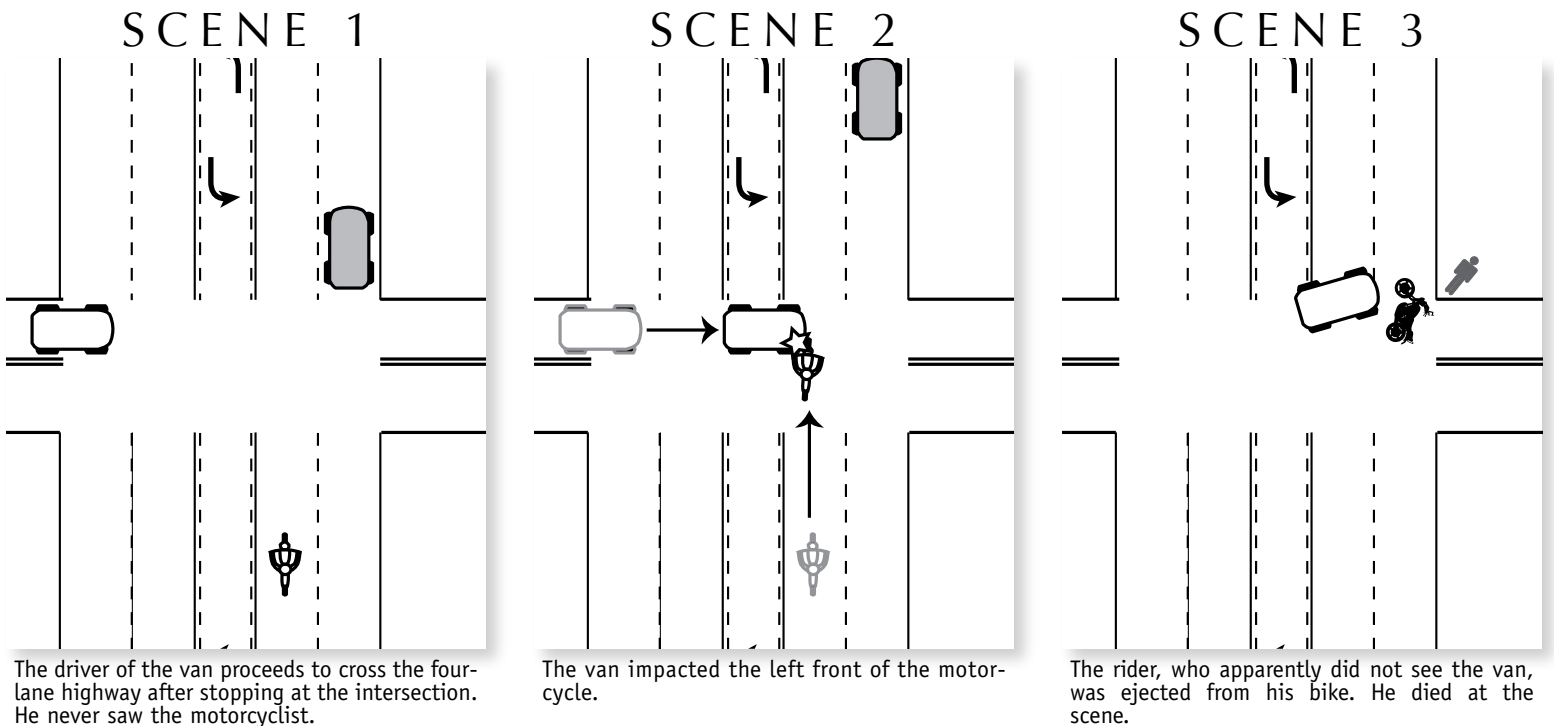
ing the stop sign at the highway. The driver came to a complete stop at the intersection and was attempting to cross the highway to the side street on the other side. The driver of the van did not see the approaching motorcycle and proceeded to cross the highway (Scene 1).

It was apparent from the investigation of the scene that the motorcyclist did not see the van as there was no evidence of an attempted avoidance of it. The collision occurred in the motorcycle's lane of travel—he was impacted directly in the left side by the front of the van (Scene 2). The rider was ejected and came to rest in the ditch on the east side of the highway (Scene 3). Fire department personnel responded to the scene but were unable to save the motorcyclist, who died at the scene.

The van was able to continue to the shoulder under its own power. The motorcycle sustained major damage and was a total loss. The van sustained significant damage but was still drivable.

Analysis

The investigating officer determined that the driver of the van caused the collision and was in violation of RCW.



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46.61.190—Failure to Yield Right-of-Way (\$175 fine). In a post-collision interview, the driver stated that he did not see the motorcycle until he impacted it.

Opinion

This unfortunate collision occurred because the driver of the van failed to yield to the motorcycle. I believe the reason the collision occurred was because of inattention to the task at hand, which was driving. If the driver of the van had been paying more attention, he may well have seen the motorcycle. He made a fatal error and did not clear the intersection before he continued

through it, causing the death of the young motorcyclist.

The rider did not commit any violations of law, but if he had seen the van come across both southbound lanes and the center two-way turn lane, it may have given him the opportunity to brake or make an evasive maneuver that could have saved his life. The motorcyclist was wearing appropriate riding gear, full-face DOT helmet, leather riding jacket, and pants. In this particular crash, no amount or quality of riding apparel would have saved this young man's life, but maybe better attention to the task at hand—on both the van driver's part *and* the motorcyclist—would have. **FZ**