

'It's a raised sidewalk with ski slopes on both ends of it.'

SENATOR ARAM GARABEDIAN: referring to raised crosswalk

Speed bump is raising the ire of R.I. motorists

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PROVIDENCE — It's only 2 months old and 6 inches tall, but the speed bump outside Rhode Island's State House is casting a long shadow.

Since November, critics charge, the bump has been launching unsuspecting drivers into the air, tossing them around their cars, and sending their vehicles crashing into the pavement.

The \$200,000 bump — the state's first raised crosswalk — was laid across Smith Street in front of the entrance of the State House, where legislators and State House visitors often had to dash across traffic to go to work. There have been several accidents and one fatality in the area.

But the product of good intentions is on a bumpy road to infamy.

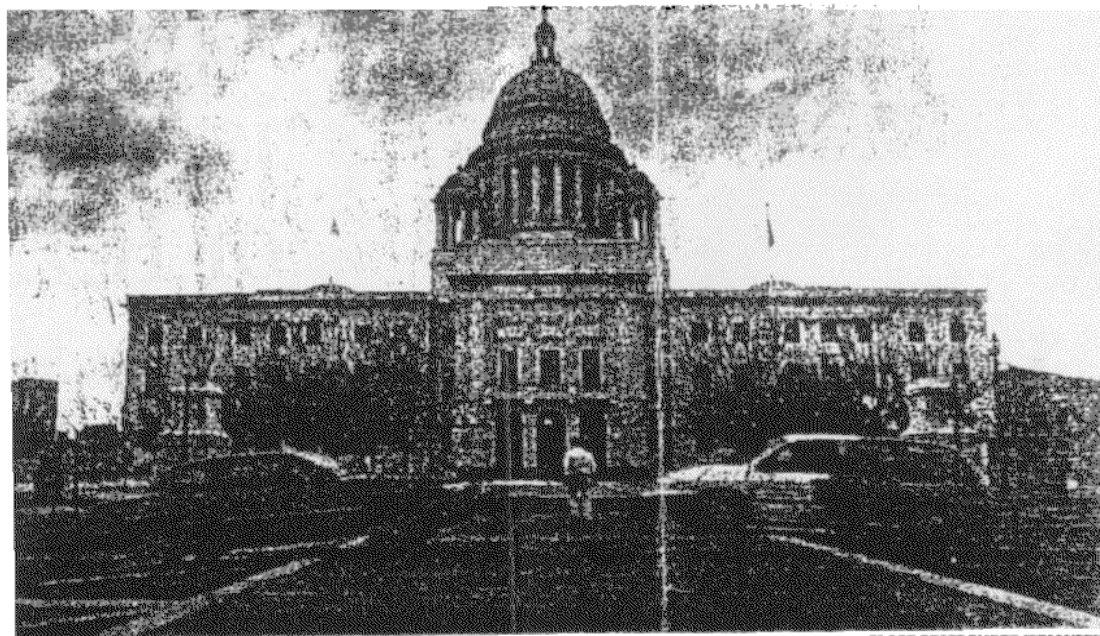
In December, a police officer

hit the bump and landed in the hospital with injured ribs and vertebrae. A senator's Lincoln Town Car leaked antifreeze after its encounter with the bump, resulting in \$1,100 worth of repairs. And a fire engine hit the bump on the way to a fire, became airborne, and cracked its frame and water tank.

"It's a raised sidewalk with ski slopes on both ends of it," said Senator Aram G. Garabedian, whose car was damaged. "I was probably going about 25 miles an hour. I didn't see any signs. I flew up into the sky and my head hit the ceiling. I thought I fell into a hole."

Garabedian, a Democrat, called for a hearing at the State House to find out why the state installed the bump instead of a less-intrusive stop, like a light.

"There's a lot of unhappy people," he said.



GLOBE STAFF PHOTO/TOM HERRI

Motorists driving over the raised crosswalk in front of the State House in Providence. A bill to eliminate the speed bump is pending before the House.

One of the bump's chief defenders is William Ankner, director of the state's Department of Transportation, who said that motorists would have to break the law by traveling over the bump at least 40 miles per hour in order to damage their vehicles. The speed limit over the bump is 20.

"The public notoriety has certainly helped it work," said

Ankner, who recently installed flashing yellow lights near the bump. "It's certainly my intention to continue to fight for it."

The battle over the tiny patch of asphalt is not over yet.

A bill to eliminate the bump is pending before the House. State Representative Robert D. Sullivan, an East Providence Democrat

who introduced the bill, said he is concerned that the bump will cost the state millions of dollars in claims from drivers who damage their cars or themselves.

And on the way to the hearing, Sullivan said, he drove over the bump at 20 miles per hour and slammed his head against the roof of his Buick.