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Local

New traffic system on way

By SHERRY A. EVANS

Battalion Reporter
Worries may be soon over for those who feel they are taking their lives in their hands every time they step onto one of the four streets which border the Texas A&M University campus.
The installation of 14 new lights run by a computerized traffic signal system on Texas Avenue, University Drive, Welborn Road and Jersey Street will be in working order soon and will help prevent the accidents

that have been occurring in increasing numbers there.

D.D. Williamson, Department of Highways and Transportation project engineer, said the installation project originally would have cost \$300,000, but due to inflation, that figure now amounts to \$754,000.

Williamson said the plan started as an experimental project on Texas Avenue five years ago. However, the department ran into a funding problem about a year later and the project was abandoned for lack of funds.

The department conducted a study around the Texas A&M campus and discovered the accident problem had grown considerably over the past few years, which led to the rejuvenation of the project, Williamson said.

"Most of (the accidents) were involved in the traffic signal area," Williamson said. "We're hoping this will reduce (the number of accidents) by giving you more progression on each of the systems."

Progression involves turning intersection lights green in succession so that a car does not have to frequently stop at red lights.

John Black, College Station traffic engineer, said the only funds presently available for such a project are Safety Improvement Funds — federal funds given to each state highway organization.

The highway department main office, located in Austin, decides which city projects are to receive money from the Safety Improvement Fund.

This decision is based on the Safety Improvement Index (SII) number each proposed project receives. Black said accidents are used to calculate this number, with a dollar value for each type: fatality cost — \$140,000; injury cost — \$5,300; and property damage cost — \$760. The higher the SII, Black said, the more

likely a city is to get project funding.

Williamson said SII numbers are determined by the estimated insurance rates involved in each accident.

Williamson said the reduction in accidents must at least equal the cost of the improvements. He said the SII of the particular project was about five, meaning the accident reduction had to be five times the cost of the improvement.

The SII numbers, which are used statewide, increase with inflation, and a project must now have an SII of approximately six to get funded when the required SII at one time had to be only one.

Black said the computerized system works in three steps: sensing, deciding and executing.

The computer senses traffic flow through metal detectors, loops in the pavement which tell the computer when a car is passing.

The main computer makes decisions according to data from the controllers (smaller computers) installed in metal cabinets at each intersection, Williamson said. The controllers act as fully independent traffic signals under low traffic volume.

As traffic volume increases, the detectors feed this information to the controllers which in turn relay it to the main computer. The computer then establishes a traffic pattern that will move traffic smoothly around the entire campus perimeter.

Williamson said the system will run on a seven or 10-day clock. This means the computer can be programmed for a normal seven-day week plus three days of special events such as a football weekend.

Installation of the controllers will begin as soon as they pass Texas Department of Public Safety tests, Williamson said.

The controllers are not passing high heat tests, he said. They must

be able to withstand temperatures of up to 165 degrees in their cabinets at each intersection, but they have been failing tests at these temperatures.

Williamson said the main computer, which is due to arrive about the end of November, may arrive before the controllers pass the heat tests. As a result, installation of the computer may be delayed until the controllers arrive.

Williamson said several old controllers from some of the intersections may be salvaged and put into use in other parts of Bryan-College Station. He said the department has submitted SII forms to reinstall the old controllers to establish progression at several intersections in Bryan. However, Williamson said, "We don't know whether or not the accident ratios will be high enough to pay for the installation."

Responsibility for this project is shared — up to a point — between the city and state. Agreements are signed by both, delegating specific duties and obligations of each. Black said the highway department owns Texas Avenue, Jersey Street, University Drive and Welborn Road and the City of College Station must maintain the traffic signals, street name signs, pedestrian crosswalk markings and police protection on these streets.

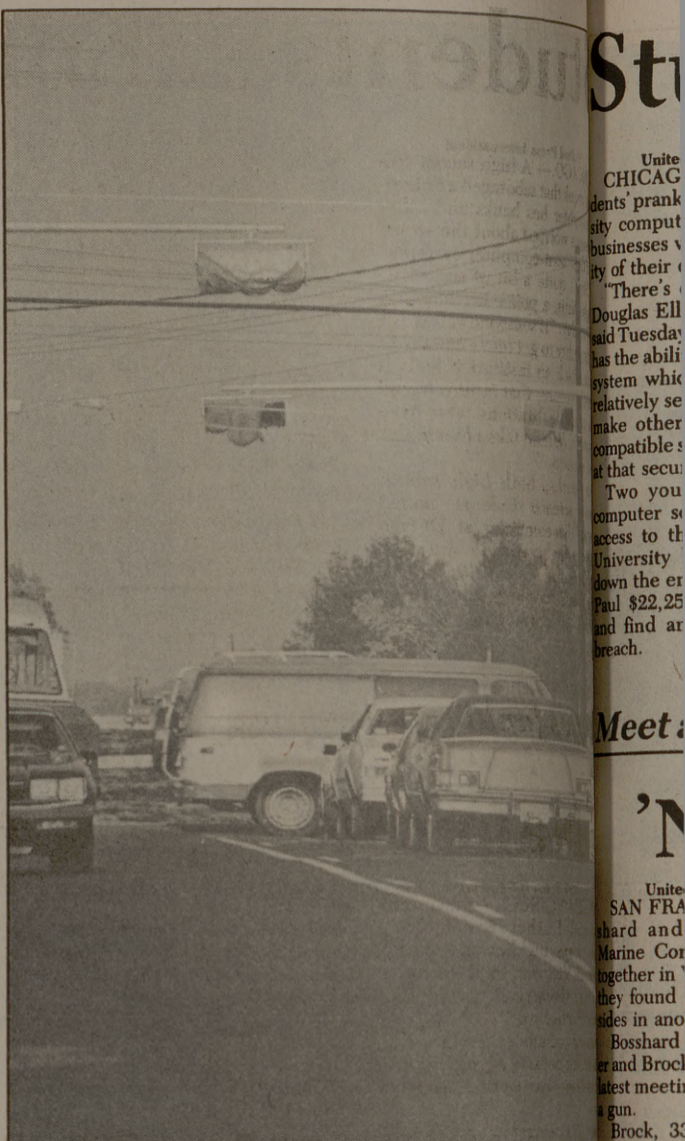
Once the entire system has passed inspection, the main computer will be housed in Black's City Hall office and traffic patterns will be established according to one of four different control methods:

1. The signals can be operated manually and individually through the computer.

2. They can be operated according to the time of day. The computer will select timings and program special time-of-day entries.

3. The signals can be put on automatic control. The computer will select timings according to the volume of cars.

4. If the computer fails, each intersection controller will take over and control traffic flow according to a pre-programmed pattern based on the number of cars that it senses at each intersection.



New traffic lights will soon be in operation at the intersection of Southwest Parkway and Hwy. 6. A peak hours of traffic, especially in the late afternoon, cars coming off Southwest Parkway form a long line and may wait as long as five minutes before being able to get on to Hwy. 6. The new lights hopefully solve this problem.

In spite of the computer's sophistication, Williamson said, "It's probably going to take a whole lot more attention to keep it operational than the current system." However, he said he expects the new system to handle traffic much better than the present system.

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