

JEGSC focuses on Wellborn Road safety issue

Members discuss Operation Lifesaver, public awareness project

By JOANNE WHITTEMORE
 THE BATTALION

The Texas A&M Graduate Student Council discussed ways to improve safety on Wellborn Road and gave support to the proposed University Center Complex Fee Tuesday night.

John Alvis, council president and a nuclear engineering graduate student, said the council is pursuing safety improvements for the thoroughfare and adjacent railroad.

"I see it as two separate, distinct issues," he said. "One is the actual road itself with the car traffic safety, and the other one is the railroad."

Students and residents of College Station are known to cross Wellborn Road and the railroad tracks at dangerous spots other than designated crosswalk areas, Alvis said.

Drivers sometimes attempt to "beat the rain," or cross the railroad tracks when a train is approaching an intersection, he said.

Jessica Franklin, an employee of the Texas Transportation Institute, addressed the council on behalf of Operation Lifesaver.

Operation Lifesaver is a national, non-profit organization dedicated to educating

the public about railroad-crossing dangers. Franklin said Operation Lifesaver is a combination of the three E's — education, engineering and enforcement.

Education increases public awareness of railroad-crossing dangers; engineering ensures transportation officials maintain safe railroad crossings; and enforcement means issuing citations to people who violate railroad-crossing laws.

Texas leads the nation in collisions between trains and motor vehicles.

"In 1995, there were 464 crashes at highway railroad crossings," she said. "Fifty-five of those crashes were fatalities."

Franklin said the majority of collisions occur during the day within 25 miles of victims' homes. In 1994 and 1995 more than 500 people lost

their lives by illegally crossing railroads throughout the country.

Shanna Collie, the council graduate life officer in charge of researching Wellborn Road and a toxicology graduate student, said about 26,125 cars travel the campus stretch of Wellborn Road daily.

The city began a project to improve Wellborn Road in the late 1980s. The project was dismissed because of lack of funding.

In 1995, an Austin firm was hired to create a 20-year plan to make Wellborn Road safer for pedestrians and drivers.

The plan would widen Wellborn Road to six lanes between University and George Bush Drive.

Another phase of the plan calls for the relocation of the railroad tracks, which would cost \$45 million.

Collie said if the plan is adopted, construction will not begin for another five to seven years.

"Anything GSC can do or anything A&M can do, will probably help (speed up) the process," she said.

Alvis said the council is planning to implement a project to increase public awareness of railroad safety.

"It would be real easy to come up with a catchy saying and print it up on buttons," he said. "For one week, we could have a Wellborn Road Safety Week where we hand buttons to everybody who crosses at either the Albritton Tower crossing or ... close to the Rec Center."

The council also voted on the proposed University resolution regarding an increase in student fees. The possible increase would raise the University Center Complex Fee by \$2 a year for the next three years. The fee has not been raised in five years and is currently \$24.

The council supported the fee increase to maintain the current level of service provided by the MSC.

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Chris Reed
 Speaker of the Senate

successful, do we remove the new senator to reinstate the old one?" he said. "Or do we add a new seat, which is in proportion to the college population? If the appeal does not go through, the senator will be removed. We've always followed the rules." David Johnston, a junior math major and editor of the Col-

lege Republicans newsletter, The Clarion, investigated the situation. In an article written by Johnston for The Clarion, he said the Senate's decision to postpone the dismissal was based on political motivations. "The senators that were removed were politically aligned against Reed and Chris Miller, speaker pro tempore," Johnston said. Reed denied the involvement

of political alignment concerning the decision.

"We don't have factions in the Senate," Reed said. "Our removal policy does not concern politics. The rules are quite clear."

When the decision was made, the only major issue calling for a vote was, the diversity appreciation bill, which had risen in the Senate.

"I didn't even have a chance to know which senators supported my views and which didn't," Reed said. "They didn't make their grades. That's the bottom line."

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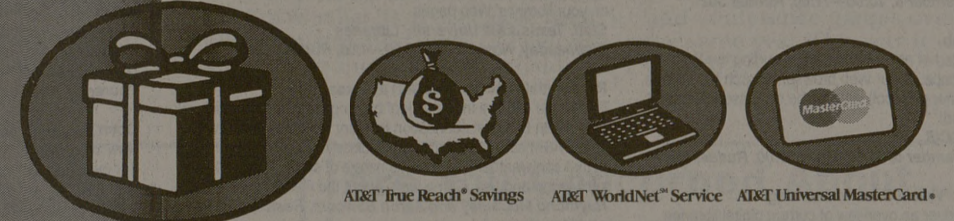
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