

Watching Traffic Go

By Kara Post, *Portland Christian & Chelsea Brooks, Benson High School*
Contributing Writers

Imagine times when you were late for work and at the moment when you were going to make that yellow light, it turned red! It seems as if the light is aggravating you and only you. Most people seem to have experienced that.

What makes those traffic lights turn so systematically? How was it determined how long a yellow light should stay yellow and how is it that we can sometimes catch green lights all the way up Martin Luther King Blvd.?

All of our questions were answered when the Saturday Academy Applied Mathematics (SAAM) took an educational field trip to Kittelson and Associates, a traffic engineering firm. We learned about the computers in the traffic lights and how much research it takes to figure out how the traffic lights should be programmed. We found that the traffic engineers used a lot of the mathematics that we learned in our SAAM Institute. We also researched a problem of our own.

Our mission was to find the quickest mode of transportation and the mode of transportation that served the most people in the downtown vicinity. The choices tested light rail, walking or cars. We took a vote before beginning our work, and most of us believed that the pedestrians would provide the best transportation system. So we all put our guess to the test.

We split up into three groups. Each group was to go out around downtown Portland and test each of the three

modes of transportation. While it was hard work, it was also fun. Our fellow SAAM students were enjoying themselves and concentrating on the task at hand. When the tests were through, we all got back together and compared our findings. Our research showed that, indeed, walking provided the quickest mode of transportation in downtown Portland.

Kara Post will be a Junior at Portland Christian in the fall. She has been involved with Saturday Academy for 2 years. Chelsea

Brooks served as an assistant teacher at Saturday Academy this year and will be attending Benson in the fall as a Senior. Saturday Academy is a pre-college education program of the Oregon Graduate Institute of Science and Technology (OGI). For more info., call Renée Anderson at 503/282-2694.



Marcus Broussard presents his group's data to the rest of the Saturday Academy Applied Mathematics group at the engineering firm of Kittelson & Associates.



Karimah Guion (left), Kara Post (middle) and Casey Downer (right) are collecting traffic data for the research problem assigned to them. They are shown with the traffic engineer (far right) from Kittelson & Associates.

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