

Los Angeles Roads Plagued by as Many Cars as There Are People

Los Angeles—UPI—The populous and widespread Los Angeles metropolitan area still is growing and one of its major growing pains is a king-size traffic problem which is a daily headache to most motorists.

At last count—as of Dec. 31, 1980—the city had an estimated population of 2,515,400. An estimated 2.5 million vehicles jam the city's streets every 24 hours.

Los Angeles county has almost 2.5 million passenger car registrations—the largest in the nation—plus thousands more vehicles such as buses and trucks.

These figures alone make traffic experts shudder, but to make matters worse the area has no mass rapid transit system and people either like to or are forced to drive their cars more than in other areas. The sprawling city encompasses 457.2 square miles and it seems sometimes like a day's journey to go from one end of it to the other.

Can't Improve

The traffic problem can't improve because most experts predict the population will increase to at least 4 million by 1990.

There are approximately 100 miles of freeway in operation in the city and the total will soon reach 278 miles

under a construction program coordinated by the State Division of Highways.

Construction goes on daily—new lanes are being added to old freeways where possible—and new freeways are near completion in the hope of easing the traffic pressure.

In peak hours, morning and evening, the freeway system is loaded to capacity and trips that take a half-hour during relatively light hours may take twice that long during the rush.

One of the major phases of the over-all plan to ease traffic is an attempt to lure people into mass transit facilities—the bus and streetcar system operated by the Metropolitan Transit Agency (MTA).

MTA carries about 750,000 passengers daily on some 90 lines, serving a four-county area that covers nearly 9,000 square miles and has a population of 7 million. But the service, largely on surface streets, cannot be called rapid.

An engineering firm has recommended a master plan for rapid transit with an overhead high-speed network branching out from the heart of the city. The engineers recommend use of electrically propelled cars on pneumatic rubber tires running on concrete tracks. The cars, linked in trains, each would carry 54 passengers and would

travel at an average of 35 to 40 miles an hour. It is estimated the traveling time between the downtown area and outlying points would be cut in half. Cost of installing the initial 74.9 miles of the system was estimated at \$529,700,000.

"The big question is how to pay for it," said Ernest R. Gerlach, MTA's chief engineer.

Gerlach, a graduate of Lehigh University who has worked on traffic problems in Chicago, Cincinnati and New York, said the area's present traffic trouble is due to lack of planning 20 or 30 years ago. He said no one foresaw the tremendous growth potential of the area.

Gerlach smiles at the suggestion that private car pools can solve the traffic problem. "We have the biggest car pool you could want," he said. "We can take 50 riders at a time and they have no driving or parking problems."

The private car pool idea has not gone over in a big way here, according to another traffic expert, A. L. Hutchinson, acting manager of the City Traffic Department.

"It's a problem common to the western United States," he said. "People have been brought up on the convenience of having a set of wheels handy. Most drivers don't want to take the responsibility of a pool. For instance, the driver can't stay downtown after work if he wants to and it interferes with his personal life."

Traffic manager Sam Taylor

recently suggested that car pool drivers be given a "bonus" in the form of a reduction in auto license fees as an incentive, but the idea doesn't seem to have taken hold.

Hutchinson believes that automatic traffic signals are the least costly method of controlling the stream of vehicles. Automatic computers have been installed to regulate the flow on many main surface arteries. For example, there is one computer at Hutchinson's City Hall office that regulates the flow of traffic on Wilshire Blvd. at 38 intersections. The mechanical brain receives information from

radar receivers and pressure bars on the street and controls the "go" and "stop" signals.

The Traffic Department has tried most of the standard remedies—one-way streets, reverse lanes morning and evening, and advocated staggered working hours to spread the flow of traffic.

Many of them depend on public acceptance. One-way streets, for example, run into opposition from merchants affected.

At present, the city uses what it calls the "share the green" system. Motor and pedestrian traffic go simul-

taneously at an intersection for a period, but then a light flashes "don't walk" to give cars a chance to make turns unhampered.

The men who have the traffic problems on their hands are convinced of one thing—the full cooperation of the public is needed to make any reforms effective.

MTA board Chairman A. J. Eyraud put it this way: "Community acceptance will be a major factor in determining the authority's policy. There is no intent on the part of the MTA board to pursue or build a plan unacceptable to the public."

Dr. Taylor Elected To Josephine Group

Ashland — Dr. Arthur S. Taylor, chairman of the social science division at Southern Oregon college, has been elected an honorary member of the Josephine County Historical Society.

The society operates a museum in Kerby, and is planning on opening a museum in Grants Pass.

Other historical societies of which Dr. Taylor is a member include Shasta County, Siskiyou County, Idaho, Mercer County, Illinois, Southern Oregon, and New York State.

HEALTH BILL REVAMPED
Salem—UPI—Voting 19-10, the Senate has approved and returned to the House a drastically revamped mental health bill.

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