

TOPICS



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Traffic Videos: Making Sense of Statistics

For years, traffic engineers have struggled with communicating their message to project developers, city officials and the public. Terminologies like a Level of Service "C" finding might mean something to an engineer, but these words often leave others scratching their heads. Faced with an audience staring blankly during a presentation, the traffic engineer often responds with more statistics! Does a 95th Percentile Queue Length measurement of 225 feet clarify the point he/she is trying to make? Well, usually not. This is where technology can help.

Fortunately for traffic engineers and their audiences, powerful computer modeling tools exist that help to bridge the communication gap. The models allow the engineer to graphically and accurately simulate real world existing and proposed conditions. Traffic engineers are able to analyze developing areas, identify congested locations and test multiple mitigations to ensure effective traffic operations.

The process often starts with an animation that depicts the existing traffic conditions. When stakeholders and decision-makers see the existing conditions accurately portrayed, the communication gap begins to close and the traffic engineer gains a high degree of credibility.

The next step usually involves testing various intersection and roadway treatments to determine how to best serve the needs of a study area. During testing, informed decisions are made easier by assessing electronic exhibits of cars moving over a design alternative.

Finally, optimal designs are selected and implemented to carry out the transportation needs of the project.

So, the next time you have a need to understand traffic flow, don't bother pulling out the stop watch to see what 42.7 seconds of turn lane delay means. Instead, watch a precise real-time traffic simulation and judge for yourself if your traffic engineer has produced successful solutions for your project.



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