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Heavy Traffic

And everybody wants to know what to do about it

BY MARK SCHULTZ

Dwight Mengle, of the Tompkins County Planning Department, tells a story that he says summarizes municipal transportation problems.

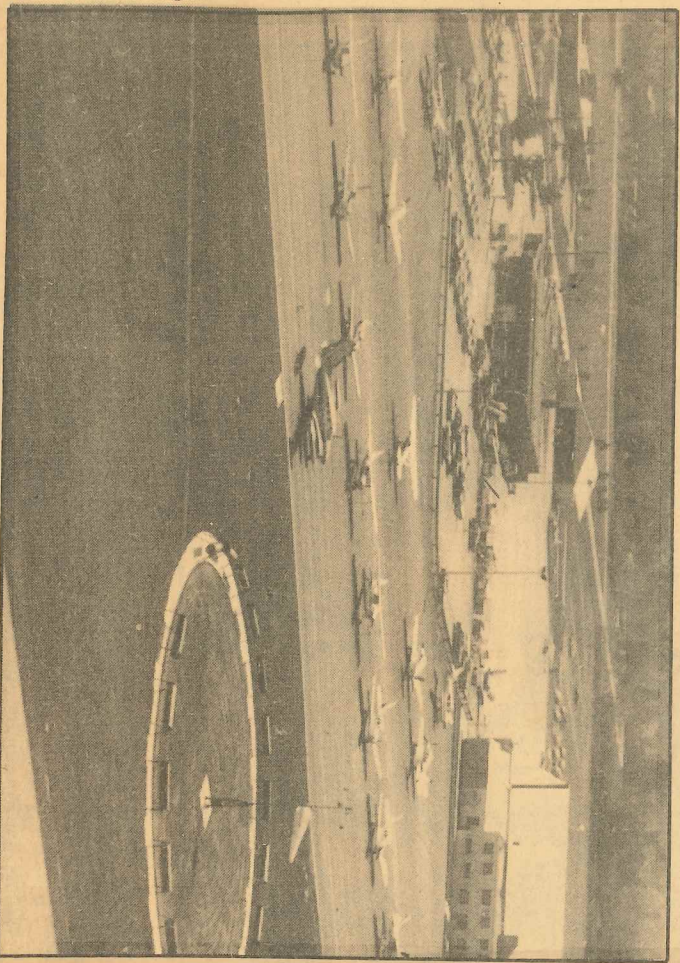
An elderly Asian woman boards a bus in New York City carrying a live chicken she's just purchased at a market. "I'm sorry," the driver tells her as she deposits her money. "The only animals allowed on board are seeing-eye dogs and hearing-ear dogs. You can't bring that live chicken on."

Vehicle miles traveled per mile of state highway, also ranks first in number of accidents, and the number is increasing: 1,302 accidents in 1982; 1,469 in 1983; and 1,501 in 1984, the last year Liguori included in his chart.

"All of this," he said, "has got to tell us something."

Growth Patterns

Liguori and city Planning Director Thys Van Cort don't often agree, but both said local governments must begin working together to prevent sprawl, uncoordinated development which spreads new



photo/Randi Anglin

Getting ready to lengthen the runway.

needing to get home, the woman reaches down to her bag, snaps the chicken's neck and takes a seat.

Mengle told that story at last week's forum on transportation in Tompkins County. After the nervous laughter died down, he explained: "Decisions may not be elegant, but it gets the job done."

If there was a theme to last week's discussion it was that something needs to be done. Faced with an outdated highway system, a growing population and an even faster growing amount of traffic, various speakers said the transportation problem needs to be addressed now — preferably through inter-municipal cooperation.

Common Knowledge

"It's pretty common knowledge that Tompkins County is continuing to grow," said the county planning commissioner, Frank Liguori. The growth can be seen in new housing: high-rise apartments in Colledge town and new suburban developments just outside the city limits. "But most of all, I think we see it in our traffic problem," Liguori said. "Everybody seems to complain about traffic."

A hundred years ago the Tompkins County population was about 35,000; the city's was just 9,000, Liguori said. "It was a sleepy little town — the way some people would like to see it today."

In 1980, the county population had risen to 87,000, with projections of about 100,000 people by the end of the century, Liguori continued. But while people are expected to increase by a steady 6-8 percent per decade, traffic will increase much faster, he said.

Unlike the smaller cities surrounding Syracuse, Binghamton and Elmira, Ithaca does not export labor. Unlike many residents of those smaller cities, most Ithacans do not travel to larger cities to work: they work right here. In fact, Liguori said, Ithaca — Cornell, Ithaca College, Morse Chain, Emerson, Thern and other large employers — actually brings workers in from outlying areas.

Traffic — the number of cars using county roads — is increasing twice as fast as the population, Liguori said. Route 13 traffic increased 3.3 percent a year from 1975-'85, and overall, county-wide traffic rose 2 percent per year.

And the road system is not keeping pace with the demands on it, Liguori said. "In the last half century the only major improvement has been to Route 13 between Elmira and Newfield and Newfield and the city," he said.

The toll, he said, is taken in accidents Tompkins County, which ranks first among neighboring counties in

housing throughout the county, accompanied by outlying shopping centers and highway-oriented strip development like that along the Elmira Road. Because sprawl intersperses areas of high population density and low density, it makes extending water and sewer lines more expensive. It also makes people more dependent on private transportation, usually cars.

"This sprawl pattern is a pattern that's going to give us trouble," Van Cort said. Taking a job at the Town of Ithaca, Van Cort put up a map with a red square that he said represented the land 60 houses would need if each were put on a one-third acre plot. He then pointed to a tiny corner of the square and said that represented the land needed by the Eddygate apartments, a 65-unit structure along the city's Dryden Road in Colledge town. While he did not say the town should limit itself to apartments, he suggested governments work together to centralize new development.

Liguori agreed. Selective development would put housing near the county's major highways with the Ithaca urban area as a hub. Additional "nodes" would spring up along these highways, or corridors, leaving more open space than the continuing sprawl would permit.

Bus Service

Selective development along the corridors would also help the county bus service, Mengle said. This development would allow buses to stop at specified stops, unlike sprawl which would require more expensive "driveway to driveway" service, he explained.

Although facilitating mass transit will not solve the county's traffic problem, it should help. Tomtran already serves every village, most hamlets and all towns in the county except Lansing and Danby, Mengle said. About 83 percent of the county bus rides occur in the city of Ithaca, which is served by the city-run Ithaca Transit system. Together the county and city buses registered 2.2 million rides last year, or an average of 22 rides per person.

But the bus system is plagued by rider confusion, which prevents even more people from taking the bus, Mengle said. "There are six numbers to call for information [about the different runs]," he said. "We need to make it easier for people to use Transit."

Getting more people on the bus would also alleviate some of the traffic problems along neighborhood streets, which because of poor access to local highways,

continued on page 17

THE ITHACA TIMES

lacrosse victories, knows he saved **Richie Moran's** record of winning seasons when he snapped one past the Brown goalie Saturday. "He's never had a losing season, and that was a big part of the emotion," said Angotti...

In a battle of wind-workers, **Tim Wilson** went 5 for 6 with three doubles and eight RBI's Sunday in that 24-19 win over Montclair. However, he finished just behind **John Deutsch** of Montclair. Deutsch went 5 for 6, with three homers

TRAFFIC from page 15

have become dangerous through-ways for commuters. Paul Booth, of the Forest Home Improvement Association, described how cars use his neighborhood to get from East Hill to Lansing and back. "By default, we've become the East Hill connector," he said.

Such traffic cannot be safely handled by most neighborhood streets, many of which evolved from farm cowpaths, said county Rep. Mary Call, who represents most of Lansing and Cayuga Heights. The former county board chairwoman called upon local governments to work together to plan new access roads and to form transportation assessment districts, which would make developers pay special fees according to the projected traffic impact of their units.

Environmental Concerns

The answer isn't just better highways and access roads, however, said city Alderman Dan Hoffman. "We all understand the allure of personal mobility and the need to move goods from one place to another," Hoffman said. "[But] transportation decisions can't be just technical ones."

"The United States has become a society hooked on personal automobile use," Hoffman said. "The big picture shows us that our resources are not limitless. We cannot continue to use them at our current rate."

History shows that new highways promote growth, Hoffman said, repeating the call for inter-municipal cooperation to plan growth more

and nine runs-batted-in. **Doug Duell** started that game for the Bombers, but didn't finish. I saw him afterward and he was just smiling, kind of with a shell-shocked look on his face. Duell gave up eleven hits and nine earned runs in three and a half innings of work...

I personally wonder what any man **Billy Martin's** age, with a solid income and a new wife, is doing inside a topless bar in the first place.

The Airport

While planners may be struggling to improve transportation on the ground, county Rep. Stuart Stein said progress is already being made in the air.

The county is in the process of lengthening the Warren Road airport's lone runway from 5,801 feet to 7,000 feet. The longer strip will accommodate more modern, quieter planes, he said, adding that construction on the lengthened runway should be completed next year.

The county is also planning a new terminal. The existing terminal has 11,000 square feet. "The consultants say we need 28,000 square feet," Stein said, adding that the number of gates will have to be increased from one to four. No designs have been made of the new building, but a site has been selected adjacent to the runway.

Like the county's roads, the airport has also seen increasing use. The county recorded 85,000 "enplanements," or boardings, in 1985. That number is expected to climb to 114,000 by 1990 and to 175,000 by 2005 — a doubling in 20 years.

Since 97.5 percent of funding for airport improvements comes from the federal and state levels, Stein stressed that Tompkins County taxpayers will not be footing the whole bill. But while the county may not be paying for the majority of the work, it does have to begin planning for it. Stein suggested adopting strict land-use controls to make sure prospective residential complaints don't force the county to someday relocate the facility, as has happened in other communities.

"Development is beginning to engulf the airport," Stein cautioned. "Now is the time to take a look at that."