

Traffic problems? What else is new Feb. 26, 1987

Our current traffic problems are nothing new. We've had them for years; they just get more complicated. The old saw: "The more things change, the more they stay the same" holds true in this case.

Chelmsford Center has been a "cross-road" since the advent of the automobile. Before the "new Route 3", (i.e. the Route 3 we know today) was constructed, the direct route from Boston to the White Mountains was through Bedford, Central Square, Vinal Square and Tyngsboro.

Traffic from Maine and New Hampshire beaches came down Route 110 through Haverhill, Lawrence, Lowell, Central Square and Littleton Road on its way west. (Route I-495 was only a vague, distant dream.)

These major routes crossed where North Road, Westford Street and Littleton Road merge into Central Square in front of the First Parish Church. In those days, the street up the hill from Jack's Diner was two-way. In fact, when the street was made one way, it took several months for the north bound seasoned travelers to become accustomed to going around the little park and turning at Eriksen's Corner. The police had nearly a full-time job stopping cars and suggesting that they back down the hill and go around.

On Labor Day evening, it was a popular sport to stand at the upper end of the Square and watch the continuous lines of cars on both routes threading their way through the intersection under the guidance of a traffic policeman. Vinal Square in North Chelmsford was a similar bottleneck.

The way It was

By George A.
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But that was all taken care of, supposedly, when Route 3 and, later, I-495 were completed. The townspeople were to get back our streets for local travel!

History tells us that long ago a barn blocked the street on the east side of the little park and that farmers sometimes drove their teams through it as a shortcut. At least our present traffic study commission is spared that headache.

On Nov. 10, 1957, as construction of Rte. 3 was nearing completion, the *Lowell Sun* ran a story titled, "Chelmsford Faces Serious Traffic Hazard at Route 3" along with a picture of the exit ramp onto Chelmsford Street near Eastgate Plaza. It was envisioned that, because only half a cloverleaf was used at the interchange, traffic problems would arise. Now, 30 years later, they have arrived and a soon-to-be-installed traffic light may be the answer.

Not too long ago, Summer Street extended only about 100 yards from Boston Road. The sole building on it was a house located about where the BayBank is located today. The continuation of Summer Street to Grove Street provided a bypass of the village. The one-way traffic flow around the Adams Li-

brary has eliminated some of the traffic tangles in Central Square. However, our periodic gains soon become offset by increased traffic.

There once was a nicely landscaped "triangle" where the concrete island is today at the juncture of Bartlett Street and Acton Road near the Center. In time this was replaced by a "silent policeman" — a heavy concrete base surmounted by a sheetmetal box that contained a cylinder which powered a flashing yellow light. A similar "silent policeman" stood at the intersection of North Road and Littleton Road.

Another problem was the railroad that crossed upper Central Square and Chelmsford Street near the Little League Field. A long train could back up traffic for a mile or more. This was minor compared to the worry it caused the Fire Department. Engine 1 was housed in the brick building at the head of Central Square. Had there been a fire in the Town Hall, or a nearby home, while a train was passing, the firefighters couldn't have reached it and would have had to call on the North Chelmsford crew.

Likewise, when the fire truck was moved to the shed behind the Town Hall and then to its present location across from the Common, a train could make it impossible to get to a fire in Central Square.

So we have traffic problems. What's new?

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