

# Traffic lights getting smarter



STAFF PHOTO/MIKE BARRETT

Smart traffic lights could increase traffic capacity at intersections such as Yonge Street and Davis Drive.

BY ROY GREEN  
Staff Writer

Imagine being able to increase the traffic capacity of Hwy. 7, Yonge Street, Weston Road and other congested roads by 10 per cent.

And imagine doing it without having to widen those thoroughfares.

It's already happening in Los Angeles and now it's coming to York Region.

The region and the federal government are about to sign on to a pilot project for smart traffic lights, otherwise known as adaptive traffic control signals.

The signals are linked to sensors in the road that monitor volume and self-adjust the amount of green time displayed at busy intersections, said Lizuarte Simas, the region's manager of traffic control systems.

"It is constantly measuring the traffic flow and will adjust to fluctuations," Mr. Simas said.

"A good example is in Toronto, where they wired a number of intersections around the SkyDome."

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City engineers say they've tweaked an extra 10 per cent capacity out of major streets without building or widening roads and reduced start-and-stop traffic by 15 per cent.

While the region isn't ready to begin making predictions, Mr. Simas said a successful pilot could lead to wider use of adaptive traffic control.

Although planners

haven't decided on a location for the pilot project, Newmarket Regional Councillor Tony Van Bynen says there's a prime example in his municipality.

"It could work wonders for both the Davis Drive and Yonge Street corridors, Newmarket's primary problem areas," Mr. Van Bynen said.

*In York Region's case, the federal government will pay half the \$500,000 cost of the pilot project under Transport Canada's Intelligent Transportation Systems program.*

"Davis Drive had over 1,000 collisions between 1999 and 2003."

Traffic congestion on Hwy. 7, might be a higher priority, according to Georgina Regional Councillor Danny Wheeler, a member of the transportation and works committee.

"Yonge and Davis can be trying at times, but I've been on (Hwy.) 7 a lot of times when it's basically just stop and go. The important thing is to get it up and running."

Mr. Wheeler also sounded a cautionary note upon learning the L.A. system comes with the state-of-the-art price of \$250 million, 70 per cent of it funded by the federal government.

"Hopefully, we don't have to deal with that. Transit ridership here is going up every year and rapid transit is coming in the fall," he said.

"That will make some people get out of their cars and it all helps (to ease) gridlock."

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