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Brookhaven, NY Makes Way for Emergency Vehicles

GPS will detect vehicles approaching intersections and change the light to their advantage

Brookhaven Town will be upgrading its traffic signal preemption system to give emergency vehicles the advantage at intersections and decrease response times, thanks to a \$1.8 million federal grant.

When an emergency vehicle responds to a 911 call, the new system will give those vehicles the right-of-way to get where they are going more quickly and safely.

Late Councilman Keith Romaine — who died of complications from pneumonia in November 2009 — originally applied for the grant.

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The current traffic signal preemption system using infrared technology will be upgraded to a global positioning satellite Opticom™ system.

This new system uses GPS technology, along with secure radio communication, to detect emergency vehicles approaching traffic intersections, then change the light in their favor.

A transmitter will be installed in emergency vehicles to send a signal to a receiver placed at each intersection throughout the town. The transmitter will alert the receiver from up to half a mile from the intersection.

The receiver will determine which direction the traffic signal should be changed to, based on the speed and direction of the emergency vehicle as it approaches the intersection.

According to Brian Lenz, assistant director of Brookhaven Traffic Safety, the town will save \$200,000 to \$300,000 each year because the old infrared system, with its plastic lenses and flimsy antennas, is costly to fix. He expects the new system to require minimal annual maintenance.

Police vehicles won't have the new devices because they may legally run through red lights, but volunteer fire trucks and ambulances that already have the old infrared systems will have them replaced by the new GPS systems. If a department requests a new vehicle, the company that makes it will install the new system if the department requests it.

The difference between the old infrared optical signal and the new GPS system is the activation methods. The advantage of the GPS system is that it doesn't need a direct line of sight to on-coming emergency vehicles. It "sees" around corners by using satellite triangulation, instead of line of sight technology, which requires a straight line of view from transmitter to receiver. In other words, it is more accurate at detecting a signal from around corners, up hills and through trees and buildings.

Bohemia-based Hinck Electric will be installing the new system throughout the town at every intersection.

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The installation won't cause a change in traffic patterns because installation will take place on the shoulders. The project will start at the end of July after a two-week testing period, taking six months to one year to complete installation, Lenz said.

The Stony Brook Fire Department's ambulances currently have white strobe light bars, using the old infrared technology system, but Stony Brook Fire Department's First Assistant Chief Andrew Seelin doesn't think the current system is reliable enough.

"The light doesn't always change," Seelin said. "Sometimes the strobes on our vehicles don't work that great at all. We always have to recalibrate it."

Seelin, also a certified emergency medical technician, is curious to see if the new system will provide more advantages for his department than the last.

"In Stony Brook, we don't go through many intersections, but we do have the back road to the hospital," Seelin said. "It would definitely be an advantage when an emergency vehicle has to cross Nicolls [Road] to have a better system."

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For more information please read this news story from the .

Source: [Times Beacon Record](#) (July 2011)

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