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Move of arterials proposed to decrease campus traffic

By Pat Higgins

The UNL administration would like to change 16th and 17th streets from noisy arterials to quiet residential byways. A proposed plan would put new arterials farther east, in the vicinity of 19th Street, according to UNL Business Manager Ray Coffey.

City officials and university administrators have been meeting, trying to hammer out a solution to the heavy traffic 16th and 17th streets carry through campus.

An average of 30,000 vehicles a day use 16th and 17th streets, Coffey

said. The number increases during the State Fair, the first week of school and the football season.

"We couldn't even get a traffic light on 16th and S streets until a student was seriously injured there in 1975," Coffey said.

In the nine-tenths mile stretch on 16th and 17th streets, between R and Holdrege streets, there were 255 accidents between 1976 and 1978. Coffey said those streets had an accident rate 15 times higher than average for city streets.

In 1968, the NU Board of Regents passed a resolution asking the city of Lincoln to find alternative arterials to 16th and 17th streets. The Northeast Radial Highway would have provided such an alternative but was voted down. That defeat eliminated the proposed street that was intended to carry traffic from downtown to northeast Lincoln.

"Something that really spurred action from us after

the defeat of the radial was a proposal to the city Comprehensive Plan which would have paid 16th and 17th Streets as arterials indefinitely," Coffey said.

If the city goes along with the university plan to push the arterials farther east, right of way must be bought from the bankrupt Rock Island Railroad which owns a significant portion of that land.

Part of the problem is potential funding. In the past, a project that is part of the Comprehensive Plan has been eligible for federal funding and assistance. The impact of the recent federal budget cuts on road projects could cause some delays, Coffey said.

Because the UNL campus should be wholly without cross-town traffic flowing through it, the bypass to 16th and 17th streets will be built eventually, Coffey said. He compared this project to the capital construction requests made by the university to the Nebraska Legislature.

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