The green light giveth while the red light taketh away. That’s been the reality of traffic signal intersection control since Henry Ford’s assembly line manufacturing process resulted in a pandemic of motorcars for transportation. It remains so today. For every second that cars heading in one direction have a green light, cars in another direction are seeing red. When driving, red is no one’s favorite color.

As Loveland has grown, there are more cars on the road and more places to visit. Along with this, there are more vehicles on intersecting streets seeking to cross or enter main streets. Traffic signals have been adjusted accordingly, giving cross streets more time but at the expense of main streets.

Our 34th President Dwight D. Eisenhower is probably flatteringly that his street is Loveland’s most popular. Eisenhower Boulevard—U.S. 34—Loveland’s Main Street, taking motorists to the mountains, to schools and churches, to businesses and plenty of shopping.

The growth in cross street traffic means more interruptions for that main street and sometimes infuriating waits for the cross-streeters. But, more green for the cross-streeters means more red for Main Street.

The intersection of Madison and Eisenhower is a fine example, especially for those southbound Madison Avenue travelers who see a left turn onto Loveland’s busiest presidential roadway. What can be done? More green for Madison means more red for you, folks!

Aha! A Continuous Flow Intersection (CFI). What is the Dickens is a CFI? It’s an intersection design even stranger than those roundabouts that have been sprouting up all over. Most motorists have had to sit at a long red light, while just a few cars are actually turning left on a green arrow. And most motorists have also sat in the left-turn lane for more than one complete traffic cycle because the left-turn arrow didn’t stay green long enough.

This is the situation at some intersections in Loveland, with Madison and Eisenhower perhaps the prime example. Challenge is to increase left-turn and through-traffic flow at Madison without increasing red-light time on Eisenhower.

Current situation

With the current intersection arrangement, through-traffic gets a green arrow after the left-turn arrow turns red. Eisenhower traffic must wait until both the left-turn and through green phases on Madison are completed.

But what if all Madison left-turners were counted and Madison through-traffic (Throughs) could all be moving green arrows, both northbound and southbound? Impossible without proving the Big Bang Theory, perhaps?

That’s a question a Continuous Flow Intersection (CFI) accomplishes. Easier, less stressful for Lefties and Throughs of Madison moving simultaneously, which then shortens the red-light time for the cross traffic.

Here’s how

How does this work? Is it complicated? That depends on the point-of-view. For a bird flying over the intersection, it’s definitely an unusual sight.

But from the Lefty’s driver’s seat, it’s the normal procedure—mostly:

• Pull into the left lane
• Wait for the green arrow
• Drive forward and then turn left
• And at the same time, all the Throughs and other Lefties are moving.

The only real difference for the Lefties is where they stop; not at the intersection but before it.

Check it out

Diagramming how all this works on a single, flat news page is a challenge, but take a look at the illustrations and explanations provided here. And for a more animated look, visit a 5-minute video featured at www.cityofloveland.org.

Improved traffic flow

By normal standards, a CFI accomplishes the impossible: traffic flow is increased on Madison while wait time on Eisenhower is decreased.

What’s the catch?

Why hasn’t this been done before?

There’s no catch. Traffic flow increases, it doesn’t cost more than a conventional intersection improvement and safety isn’t compromised. It simply requires drivers to get into the left lane a bit sooner.

And it has been done before, but not widely… yet. CFI exist in Salt Lake City, Saint Louis and Colorado Springs, plus many in Mexico where the low construction cost makes them far more feasible than other options.

Mission Possible: More green, less red

Dateline: LOVELAND

City of Loveland

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