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Memo:HONK IF YOU CAN'T PARK

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Sports complex a bowl of problems

Plagued by traffic, lighting problems

lagging construction

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The traffic monitors at 11th and Pattison outside Lincoln Financial Field had been calling cell-phone audibles all evening.

As kickoff approached Thursday, the men - a huddle of city officials and an Eagles vice president - were determined to block the previous week's gridlock that had fans and neighbors furious.

The game plan was ambitious: find ways to keep traffic and pedestrians moving in the four-venue Sports Complex - not just for one night, but on dozens of nights when huge Eagles crowds or multiple events threaten to choke the area.

With constant updates on parking lot and roadway conditions, they sent out their high-tech signals: change traffic light timing along Broad Street, reprogram informational signs for motorists, help police rechannel pedestrians and convert half-empty VIP reserved lots to cash parking for the common folk.

Motorists crept by the brightly lit Linc, darkened Citizens Bank Park, the Wachovia Center and Spectrum, searching for still-open lots.

And that was the good news, compared to the Aug. 20 Eagles game standstill.

"That's it. We're clear," announced Shawn Jalosinski, head of the **Sports Complex Special Services District** midway in the first quarter.

"Twenty minutes' improvement over last time."

As if on cue, fireworks exploded over the Linc, for an Eagles touchdown inside. The bigwigs flanking Jalosinski laughed: They too had scored, for one night at least, against gridlock.

Jalosinski, as executive director of the special services district, convenes a parking and traffic task force with team officials and city bigwigs. On the scene Thursday were Eagles VP Don Smolenski, chief City Traffic Engineer Charles Trainor, Deputy Managing Director Fran Dougherty, with top police brass cruising the area and a PennDOT traffic dispatcher and a parking concessions official just a cell phone away.

But major problems remain at the mixing bowl of the four sports-entertainment facilities, the only such concentration of venues in any U.S. city.

There's inadequate parking, lagging construction (especially at the Veterans Stadium site), puzzling traffic patterns, poor lighting and signage, beleaguered (and politically connected) neighbors.

It's a mix of cooperation and contention, with turf wars among the venue owners and City Hall for work still undone.

The city says it gets blamed for problems outside its control. Managing Director Phil Goldsmith minces no words in wanting the teams to step up.

"We put together a sports complex, and I'm now concerned that the owners of the stadiums are acting as individual owners as opposed to acting as members of a complex," Goldsmith said.

"They need to put aside their individual differences and come together as a complex. I think sometimes it's easier to negotiate peace in the Middle East than at the sports complex."

The special services district, funded by the teams at \$1 million a year, has given those neighbors a voice and positioned Executive Director Jalosinski, a former traffic engineer, to serve as savvy go-between.

"It's good that we're all speaking the same language," Jalosinski said.

"But I'm disappointed we're not as far along as we should be."

Barbara Capozzi, one of the district's four neighborhood representatives, credits Jalosinski with improvements large and small.

The services district now publishes a monthly events listing with star-coded alerts to mark high neighborhood impact days (seven this month) with more than 50,000 expected. She says it's a refrigerator-

door staple in the neighborhoods south of Oregon Avenue.

"We're an annoyance (to the teams). They've had to deal with us. It's very much improved. Five years ago we couldn't get a dialog going," said Capozzi.

"The teams think everything ends with their little world and their parking spaces outside their door. The fans need to revolt."

Other headaches remain. The Vet lot, with 3,000 parking spaces that don't yet exist, is the hottest flashpoint.

The Phillies say their contractor won't meet an Oct. 1 deadline for two-thirds of those spaces and will be liable for \$5,000 performance penalties.

The club expects the lot to be complete by mid-November and points out that 3,000 spaces north of the old stadium have been open for months.

Eventually, 21,500 public spaces and others on private lots will be available, up from 17,500 a year ago.

But the timetable is not good enough for the city and the neighborhood, where suspicions remain that the project won't get done before December.

"When we were planning for the implosion, the (March 21) date was set because we had to meet the obligation, written or not, of having the Vet done before the Eagles' season opener," Dougherty said.

Dougherty said Goldsmith went so far as to override some neighborhood objections to speed up the big bang. But he acknowledged an earlier completion date was "never written down in a contract. Technically the Phillies are right."

City officials think the Phillies should be doing better. But they point out that the club did take responsibility for the Vet's dismantling and repaving while the Eagles walked away from its demise.

The Vet lot is only the most immediate sticking point.

The finished lot will require an entrance off Broad Street at Hartranft. The Phillies are extending Hartranft within the lot, but no one has agreed to pay for the curb cut and traffic signal, Dougherty said.

Ditto two permanent lights needed along Pattison at 11th and Darien.

Temporary lights, an improvement over the stop signs, can't be connected to the city's computerized grid.

Street lighting along Pattison between the two stadiums is another issue. The north side of Pattison, in front of Citizens Bank Park, has modern wireless fixtures, provided by the Phillies. The south side has dim, older light poles with unsightly wires strung between them.

"The Phillies were willing to pay for them," Dougherty said. "The Eagles, looking at the bottom line, had to cut here and there, and they cut the lights out."

The checkerboard of lots - at least nine are now open with 17,600 spaces - have no consistent naming or parking protocol.

East of the Linc, for example, a 3,100-space lot is called either Old Acme, East Lot or Jetro. Several lots flip between cash and reserved, depending on the event.

Jalosinski would like to see all parties agree on lot names, even if it's as simple as Lots A, B, C and D.

Beyond that, the city has a \$1 million signage package to direct motorists on and off I-95 and through the complex. The teams have tossed in \$200,000, but the city lacks its \$800,000 matching share.

"The city has spent hundreds of millions of dollars on this complex. When are we done?" Dougherty wondered.

"Let's put it in perspective. Our fiscal position is a deficit. We've got a whole city to worry about. When are the teams going to come together?"

That leaves thousands of fans (who should be taking SEPTA anyway) confused and fuming. A parking task force, which Jalosinski convened for brainstorming before Thursday's Eagles game, scrambles to play Mr. Fixit.

Jalosinski notes that the ability to reprogram traffic signs as conditions change is a major help. Last year, he said, the signs were reworded one at a time - by an Eagles intern dispatched on a bicycle. *

Illustration:PHOTO

JESSICA GRIFFIN/Daily News

A police officer directs traffic before a preseason Eagles vs. Steelers game at the Linc.

JESSICA GRIFFIN/Daily News

A police officer directs traffic before a pre season Eagles vs. Steelers game at Lincoln Financial Field.

Photos: JESSICA GRIFFIN/Daily News

Pedestrian and vehicle traffic is shown before a preseason game at the Linc.

Shawn Jalosinski has helped fix problems big and small at the complex.

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