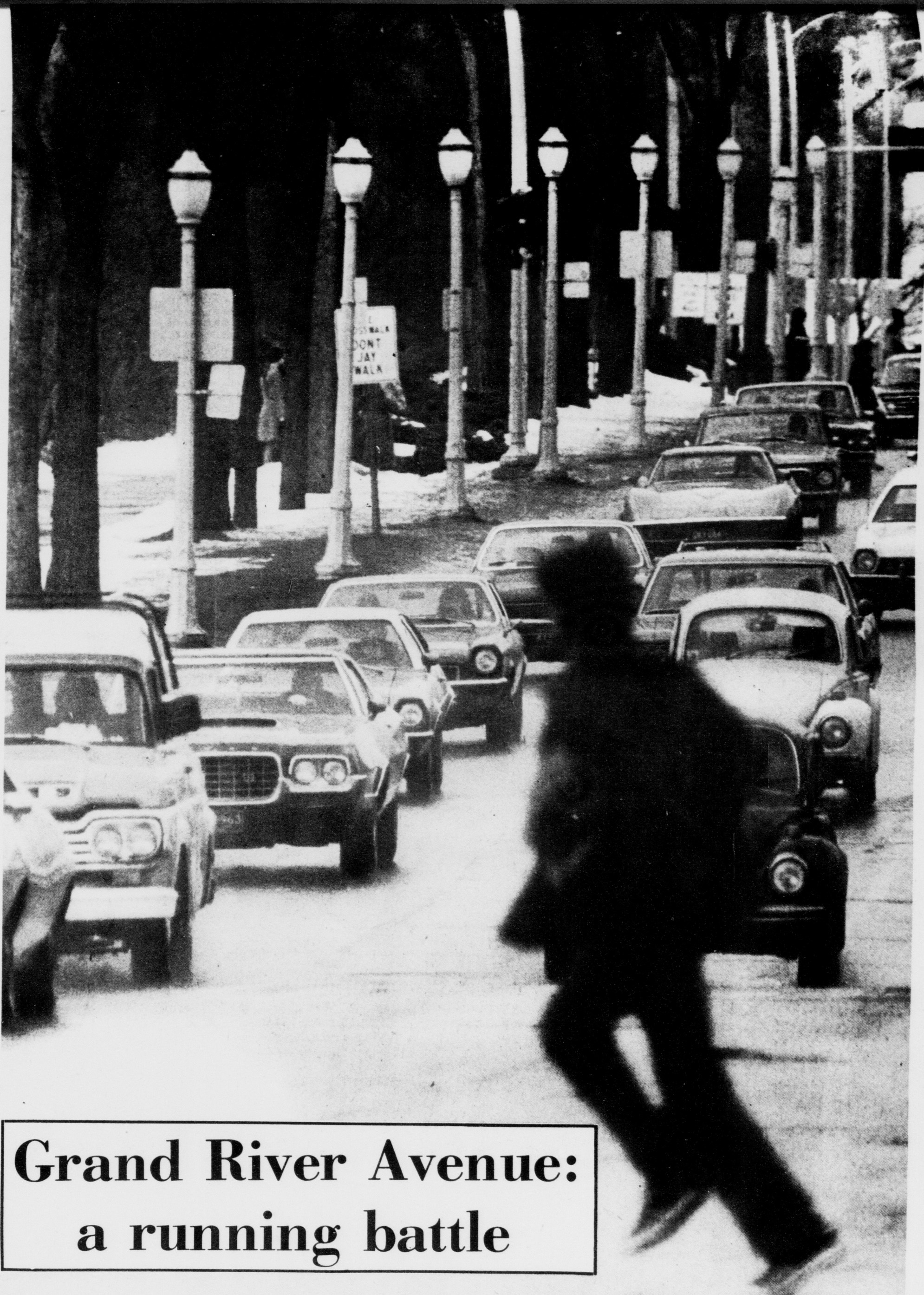
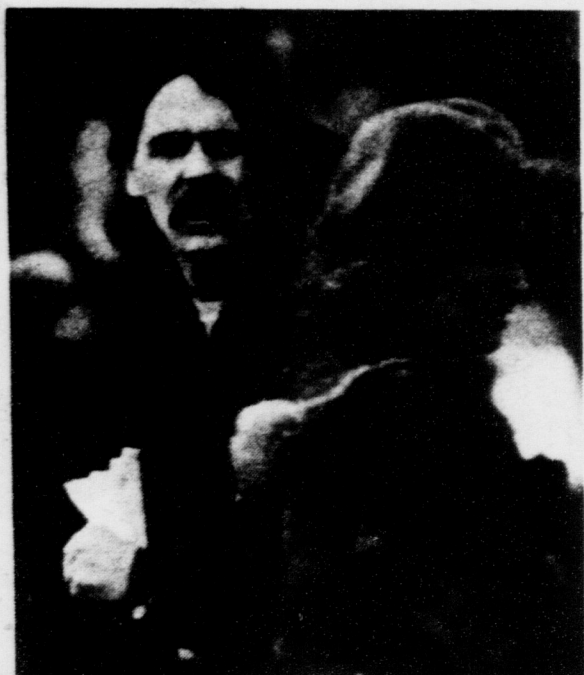




**Grand River Avenue:
a running battle**

State News Special Report



Fear shows up on the faces of many students crossing Grand River Avenue who are forced to contend with an onslaught of fume-belching traffic.

Stories and photos by
BILL WHITING
State News Staff Writer

A concrete quagmire sits astride East Lansing which threatens to drown the MSU community in a sea of busted bumpers, frazzled nerves, poisoned air and shattered dreams.

The community is finding itself increasingly bogged down by M-43, Grand River Avenue. Everyone agrees it's a problem but few have agreed on any solution.

According to latest traffic count figures taken in 1970, more than 48,000 vehicles per day rumble through the center of the city, across from the Union — the second largest highway traffic volume in Michigan.

What astounds most officials is that the conflict of so many cars and pedestrians produces so few injuries. They credit most of that phenomenon to fleet-footed students who can dart swiftly among moving vehicles.

Yet in 1972 traffic accidents increased to an all-time high, numbering approximately 558 on Grand River and Michigan avenues, the main east-west corridors through East Lansing — at least 67 accidents more than in 1971.

City traffic engineer Gordon Melvin blames

the accident increase on traffic which clogs the thoroughfare and he resignedly admits that from an operational standpoint, little more can be done to alleviate the congestion.

Melvin says it is nearly impossible to provide any more lanes along the avenue, which reduces the options to a rechanneling of traffic along an alternative route or reducing its volume through mass transit.

Melvin and State Highway Dept. officials, who regulate use of the street because of its status as a state trunk line, agree that it has become so saturated with vehicles that it is all but impossible to add any more.

And the Grand River Avenue malady isn't confining itself to six lanes north of campus. Traffic counts indicate that more motorists are opting for side street detours through the campus and city residential areas to avoid heavy congestion at rush hours.

Though the University is the heaviest contributor of traffic in the metropolitan area, the problem is compounded by traffic to and from so-called bedroom communities in Meridian Township. Grand River Avenue is the major channel for that traffic.

Highway department planners thought they



What astounds most officials is that the conflict of so many cars and pedestrians produces so few injuries.

had the problem solved in 1949 when they reached an agreement with the University for a right-of-way along the Grand Trunk Railroad tracks on south campus.

They envisioned a traffic corridor acting as a feeder to the University, tying in with a master transportation scheme for the metropolitan area. A four-lane parkway was slated for construction just south of South and East Complex residence halls, tying in Trowbridge Road with Grand River Avenue near the railroad overpass in Meridian Township.

But in 1971 plans for a cross-campus route were scrapped following a one-two punch from the board of trustees and the city council which opposed the plan and asked that further alternatives be explored.

Sparked by a growing political influence of newly-enfranchised students, the debate evolved into a major campaign issue in the city council elections in the fall of 1971. Two new councilmen, George Colburn and George Griffiths, were elected that November on a student-oriented platform which included rejection of the cross-campus concept.

A public hearing before the trustees in October that year saw a distinct division

between area government and commercial interests and student organizations and environmental concerns. This was the first real test of student power vs. established concerns.

The State Highway Commission reacted angrily to the trustee decision to seek further alternatives by calling the route a dead issue and reallocating \$10 million earmarked for its construction.

Hard feelings are still festering over the environmental name-calling that took place — and the debate has not really ended, only retreated behind closed doors as officials bide their time and play the waiting game. The planners and the engineers are cautious in their pronouncements but confident that the growing traffic problem will eventually force the trustees and the council to return to the cross-campus route as the only solution.

While the highway department has expressed a willingness to cooperate with other agencies in studying alternatives, it has declined to initiate any new studies or expend funds itself. Thus, the task has been passed to the Tri-County Regional Planning Commission which has initiated a traffic study of the metropolitan area.

The East Lansing Mass Transit Committee, appointed by the council to study alternatives, is working closely with the commission, which recently was funded \$210,000 by the Urban Mass Transportation Administration, a federal agency. Nearly \$100,000 of this will be used to finance mass transit planning, with the remaining portion of the \$315,000 project coming from funds from East Lansing, Lansing, state and regional sources.

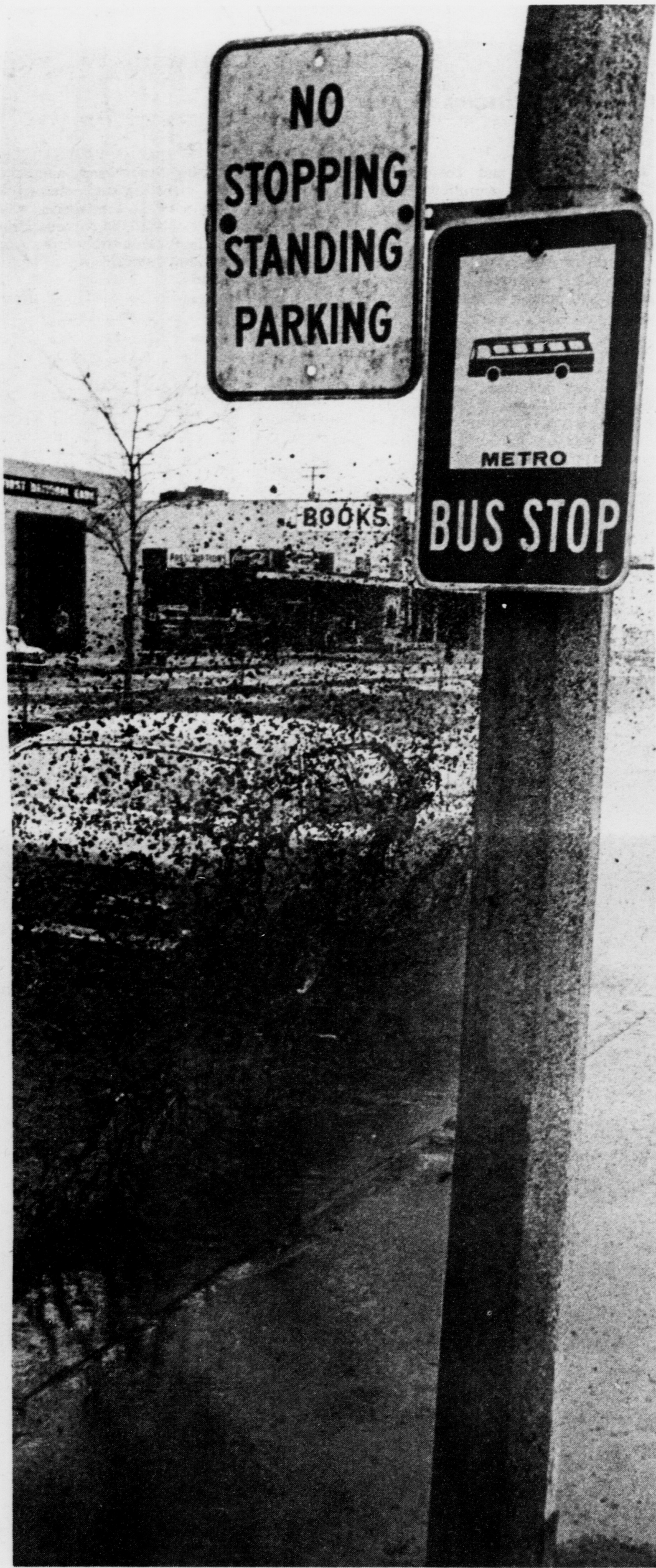
Burton Cardwell, chairman of the transit committee, says his committee, which will include approximately 12 members, with representatives from ASMSU and the Married Students Union, will work with the tri-county study to determine area activity centers for mapping mass transit proposals as well as highway planning.

Though the study will take from 16 to 18 months to complete, Cardwell says he hopes they would develop an alternative to Grand River Avenue congestion more satisfactory than the cross-campus route.

In the meantime, however, many motorists and pedestrians are voicing complaints about inaction to solve traffic tieups.

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Since the State Highway Commission dried up funds for improving Grand River Avenue traffic tieups, road repairs have been kept to a minimum — creating tidal wave conditions for pedestrians who walk next to lakelike gutters.

"MSU is the largest generator of traffic those people out there." — John Wood

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"I don't know how the University can claim 'congressional immunity' in this thing," R. J. Tavolier, manager of the Meridian Mall says. "They're public servants and their primary concern has to be the community."

Tavolier pleads his primary motivation in supporting the cross-campus route is his personal concern over Grand River Avenue congestion, rather than any beneficial effect it may have on mall business.

In a recent letter to President Wharton and the trustees, Tavolier requested the University to reopen the dialog with the highway department over the route. He argues that the trustees must look ahead to rising problems, predicting that the Grand River Avenue situation will be disastrous in three years.

East Lansing City Councilman George Colburn, who sponsored the city resolution to withdraw support for the cross-campus route, is also impatient — but in a different manner.

"I thought that if the public policy-making bodies made it clear they opposed this idea, they would have to come up with an



of traffic in the area...You can hardly maintain a parklike atmosphere when you have all

John Woodford

alternative," he says. "That doesn't seem to be happening."

Colburn says that the spirit of his resolution to cooperate in finding more acceptable alternatives has been frustrated by the attitude of noninvolvement taken by the highway department.

Colburn is critical of the city planning commission's failure to request money this year to buy minibuses for public transportation through East Lansing, especially along north-south routes tying into the campus bus system. "Three councilmen are going to have to get together and make a commitment for equipment to provide relief for traffic congestion in East Lansing," he warns.

Despite poor service and constant money problems of the Capitol Area Transit Authority, Colburn is confident that mass transit is the only rational alternative to turning over the area to concrete and automobiles.

"We've got to give it a try," he says. "If we had a good public transportation system we wouldn't have people driving.

"I don't think the alternative to congestion is continually laying down more and more concrete for cars to drive on. It's suicide."

While most officials voice pessimism over the likely success of changing the attitude of the motorist, Colburn remains optimistic that a good transit system with a low fare would do just that.

"I can't shed too many tears over the individual motorist — that person who is saying 'serve me' or 'I want to drive my big car by myself because it's convenient for me,'" Colburn says. "We've gone our share down the road to provide more convenient public transportation but the individual has to come halfway to meet us. People must help."

As for Grand River Avenue, Colburn admits it is a nuisance and an inconvenience, but argues that it is not sufficient reason to destroy the MSU campus.

He says that the cross-campus highway was probably the prime issue in his campaign for council.

"When I was a candidate for office, I heard

in 30 to 40 hearings what the people felt more than anybody in the highway department," he says. "But the people in East Lansing have the power to elect us, and I elect us, and I challenge anyone to make a case for the cross-campus route in the '73 campaign."

While Colburn's determination has not flagged since the confrontation, both the council and the board of trustees have come under heavy criticism from Lansing and state officials, as well as some local residents and businessmen who dispute their opposition to the route. State Highway Director JOHN P. Woodford, a resident of Okemos, denies environmentalist pleadings that the highway would do extensive damage to the campus.

"MSU is the largest traffic generator in the area. They can't isolate themselves and still have their goods coming and going," he says. "You can hardly maintain a parklike atmosphere when you have all those people out there."

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"We have 5,140 acres of land lying astride the natural route of the region." Motorists are forced either to come through the campus or scoot around." — Milton Baron

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Comparing the campus to a city of 50,000, Woodford argues that the University has a responsibility to provide adequate feeder routes to handle the large traffic volumes.

Woodford also maintains that the highway department lived up to the spirit of the trustee resolution in exploring alternatives.

However, only a few alternatives were seriously explored prior to the trustee decision to request further study. These included routing traffic along M - 78, Mt. Hope Road and even Jolly Road. Campus route opponents heavily favored adapting Mt. Hope Road to the purpose, but highway planners dismissed it as being too far south to be effective as a Lansing - Meridian corridor.

Such a plan would also fail to tie in to the Trowbridge Road interchange which was built several years ago to tie in to the campus route, they argued.

While Woodford denies the highway department is delaying development of mass transit alternatives, he reflects a belief that the public will not abandon their cars for mass transit.

"Only 7 per cent of the people are making trips by mass transit in urban areas today," he says. Only drastic measures — with detrimental side effects like banning cars or rationing gas sales — will reduce the car volumes, he adds.

In addition to highway department disengagement from the expenditure of funds for further studies of alternatives, major street improvements along Grand River Avenue have been limited to Meridian Township and minor work on an intersection near Evergreen Street.

Other University, city personnel and planners, who thought the highway would benefit the University, were embarrassed by trustee unwillingness to uphold a long standing agreement with the state.

"The University has long realized the importance of good relations with the community, visually and in the movement of traffic to the campus," Milton Baron, director of campus parks and planning says. "What bothers me is that we had a moral commitment that that land would be made available to tie in M - 43, M - 78, M - 27 and I - 496."

At the time of the 1949 agreement between the University and the State Highway Dept., however, only a few buildings existed on the south side of the Red Cedar River and the only activity to be disturbed near the proposed seven - mile - long construction site was farming. Today the area is heavily populated with residence halls and classroom buildings.

"With as many buildings south of the river as we have now it's very important to have another access to the campus," Baron maintains.

But several department representatives have expressed fears that the highway would disrupt delicate machinery and class activities nearby.

He says he believes that campus highway opposition was merely part of the ecology fad which swept the nation and in this instance, at least, the impact is adverse to University interests.

"We have 5,140 acres of land lying astride the natural routes of the region," he says. "Motorists are forced either to come through the campus or scoot around."

Baron says the route would help to reduce the vehicular traffic on campus and the conflict of pedestrians and vehicles on Grand River Avenue.

In addition, the highway department was prepared to budget extra funds to make the route a parkway unlike the typical superhighway.

The route would also provide a necessary tie - in with newly developed areas south of the railroad tracks now effectively removed from the north section of campus. The medical school complex, planned to be 175 acres — one of the largest units of its kind in the country — would have been opened up by the route.

As it is, the University has implemented plans to develop an extension surface crossing connecting Bogue Street with the medical complex. Though it should be completed next fall at a major expense to the University, the road extension is already considered inadequate because of the conflict of surface traffic at the railroad. "The cross - campus highway can be a demonstration of what is good rather than what a two - barrel road might look like going through the community," Baron insists. "And if we lessen the chance of somebody getting mowed down, we'll have accomplished something."

While he concedes that there may be alternatives, he maintains that other proposed routes along Mt. Hope Road also have drawbacks by cutting through Forest Akers Golf Course and Spartan Village and are not as functional as the cross - campus route.

"It's not an easy problem to solve," he laments. "You give up some things but you also gain some."



Milton Baron, director of the Dept. of Campus Parks and Planning, looks wistfully out a window in the Manly Miles Building over the proposed site of the cross campus route.

The parkway would have sliced through campus parallel to the Grant Trunk Railroad tracks and south of the South Complex residence halls in the background.

Focus: two men opposed



*"Mass transit just takes too much time
and time today is geared to dollars."*

— John Patriarche

There is a constant low-pitched rumble rolling through the streets of East Lansing.

It's reverberations from Grand River Avenue, or M-43, and how far that rumbling will eventually be felt is anybody's guess.

The controversy surrounding the area's most congested thoroughfare is the clearest evidence yet of the impact of the student voter.

Though MSU students did not have a direct veto over the cross-campus highway, which was proposed as an alternative to M-43, they did have enough political clout to influence and to redirect a 20-year-old University and community commitment to metropolitan transit planning.

For East Lansing City Manager John Patriarche, the cross-campus highway is a means of reducing traffic congestion on Grand River Avenue and of remaking it into a tree-lined, pedestrian-oriented state.

However, Louis Twardzik, director of the Dept. of Campus Parks and Planning, sees the campus route as an extension of the problem, rather than an attempt at solving it.

Both men believe in their causes, which are ironically quite similar. But their methods for creating a more liveable community are perhaps irresolvably opposed.

Patriarche complains the controversy has left East Lansing in a situation where all it can do to improve Grand River Avenue is to continue making minor repairs and to fill chuckholes. The reassessment caused by the rejection of the route has left the fate of the avenue in limbo.

"We had a program all worked out to handle

the traffic needs of the community through 1980 and beyond," he says. "But that came to a screeching halt when the route was turned down by the University.

"But we still have the problem and we have to find a way to handle cars coming in, out and through the University and the community."

Patriarche, city manager for 25 years, has worked with highway planners in designing a metropolitan transportation plan to which the campus route was the final link.

He readily admits that the thoroughfare is badly in need of repairs and of major modifications but says the highway department, which must fund such projects, will not spend large amounts of money until there is a final determination of traffic patterns.

Patriarche says that needed major improvements include the replacement of curbs, repaving, improvement of street lighting and a beautification program — all stalled by the cross-campus controversy.

City planners have longed to put a new face on Grand River Avenue. They have been banking on the cross-campus highway to draw off most commuter traffic so that the avenue can be returned to city jurisdiction. Plans call for a reduction from six lanes to four and an increase in pedestrian traffic through a beautification program.

"It's not going to happen," Councilman George Colburn countered.

And even traffic engineer Melvin says cautiously that he would hold out for a firm

commitment from the highway department before entering into a deal.

Though Patriarche says he can live with the council's decision to back away from the cross-campus route, he remains convinced that it offers the most for the community.

"Eventually, after they restudy this whole situation, they'll decide that this probably has the most pluses," he maintains. "That isn't to say it'll be perfect. But I think there are a lot of beautiful highways, and this one would reduce our problems a great deal."

Patriarche says he hopes recommendations for mass transit proposals can be incorporated into the cross-campus route. But he doubts that motorists will have a change of heart.

"It's pretty hard to visualize a mass transit system that will take you everywhere you want to go in a day," he says. "Mass transit just takes too much time, and time today is geared to dollars."

City planners have been frustrated in other attempts at traffic improvement since the cross-campus decision. Development of a peripheral route north of Grand River Avenue has been stalled by Council inaction for over a year. A public hearing had provided a forum for angry opposition from groups of students and environmentalists who criticized plans to build through a section of Valley Court Park and through a student rental housing section.

"In a university community a lot of things become more overblown than they do in other communities," Patriarche adds.

*"Somewhere along the line it has to be recognized that there is
a social utility in being able to walk across the street."*

— Louis Twardzik



For many residents of the University community, the halting of proposed street construction is a positive sign.

"Somewhere along the line it has to be recognized that there is a social utility in being able to walk across the street," Louis Twardzik, chairman of the Dept. of Natural Resources emphasized. "Somebody has to place a value on it."

Twardzik, who lives on Grand River Avenue and has an office looking out at the site of the proposed cross-campus route, says that planners up to now have been concerned almost exclusively with the movement of traffic and not with the people who live along the route. He is convinced that the problems of Grand River Avenue should remain where they are.

"I have strong feelings about this campus. There aren't many like it anywhere. It's a place where great numbers of people live. It is unique as a community in itself.

"Being the size it is - a solid block of land - I consider the thought of putting a road of that kind through the campus on level with putting a similar road through a national park. I would use every possible alternative before agreeing to putting a road through this unique chunk of land that we call MSU."

Twardzik envisions the campus as a model

for a community development in a parklike atmosphere - a park where people live and not just visit. "Who has the greater problem?" he asks. "True, a lot of motorists are inconvenienced. But the primary consideration should be the people who live there."

Twardzik says the proposed route is an affront to traditional attempts to encourage a campus park setting at MSU. He argues the highway department should study every alternative, even tunneling Grand River Avenue underground, if it will help alleviate congestion, above-ground noise and air pollution.

"I don't think that we've fully addressed the problem until we've probed the costs," he states. Highway officials admit that they have not given serious consideration to such a proposal because of prohibitive costs.

"This is raised as an alternative and dismissed out of hand. But that the public should dismiss it, too, distresses me even more," he said.

While he expresses confidence that the trustees and city council will not approve the cross-campus route, Twardzik didn't rule out the possibility of a legal action being taken to prohibit future construction.

He cited one recent case in Memphis as an example of citizens banding together to

forestall a planned highway incursion through a city park.

"The Transportation Act will not allow them to put a road through a park unless all the alternatives are fully explored," he said. "Well, this is a campus park and in the views of many people, we are suggesting that all the alternatives are not fully explored. I think we can expect the people in this area to have similar views as those in Memphis and expect them to act similarly."

Twardzik says he would even like to see the campus formally registered a historic landmark as the first land grant college. While such a step would be unprecedented for a college campus, he maintains that the historical significance of the University is enough justification, while such a step would make it impossible for the state to put through a road of the magnitude of the cross-campus route.

Twardzik noted that the University is a prime attraction for people from all over the state as a sanctuary for nearly 500 different species of plants. He rejects arguments for the route which note the existence of the railroad tracks across the campus which act as a barrier and environmental disturbance already.

"That's starting out with a false premise and building on it," he scowls.

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"I don't think the alternative to congestion is continually laying down more and more concrete for cars to drive on. It's suicide." — George Colburn

