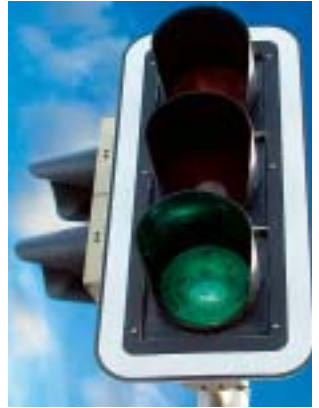


# We know traffic, and we're getting noticed.



*The Traffic Group*



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See what *Baltimore* magazine says about The Traffic Group and founder Wes Guckert: Now reigning over the mid-Atlantic region's largest “just traffic” consulting firm, Guckert has been involved in more than 3,000 projects. Many are in the mid-Atlantic, but The Traffic Group is also now international, working on solutions from Indonesia and South Africa to Mexico, the Caribbean, and the United Arab Emirates.

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## Playing in traffic

BY DAN COLLINS

In life, you can be certain of three things: death, taxes, and—as any commuter crawling past I-83's Pepsi sign at 8:15 a.m. knows—traffic.

BUT FOR WES GUCKERT, THE 55-YEAR-old president of White Marsh-based The Traffic Group, the nerve-racking grind of Baltimore's bumper-to-bumper conundrum is the ultimate fun-time puzzle for a rainy Sunday afternoon.

"I get tremendous pleasure out of solving problems associated with traffic," says Guckert. "When I worked for the Maryland State Highway Administration, I would take the fatal accident reports from state police and investigate every one. 'Was it driver error? Was something wrong with the road? Had that tree not been blocking the stop sign, if there was a change in the speed limit, might the accident been avoided?' I just love solving the traffic problems people might think are hopeless."

Now reigning over the mid-Atlantic region's largest "just traffic" consulting firm, Guckert has been involved in more than 3,000 projects. Many are in the mid-Atlantic, but The Traffic Group is also now

international, working on solutions from Indonesia and South Africa to Mexico, the Caribbean, and the United Arab Emirates.

After learning the ropes with a small firm, Guckert founded The Traffic Group in 1985 and built it into a 75-person company. Providing traffic engineering and consulting to governments and private concerns, it's selling \$10 million a year and growing roughly as fast as traffic itself—at 10 to 15 percent per year.

**"Getting commuters to give up their cars isn't so tough—it just takes a little innovation."**

In Guckert's industry, business is good if you're doing lots of "traffic counts."

"We do more traffic counts than most state departments—20,000 last year with 1,500 pieces of traffic-



Guckert: Bracing for the two-and-a-half-hour rush hour.

counting equipment," Guckert says. But being a traffic geek to the stars is not a calling he foresaw.

In 1967, he enlisted in the Air Force and became a Vietnamese linguist. "As the war wound down, I went to work for the State Highway Administration in the materials-testing lab, which I found terribly, terribly boring," Guckert recalls. "I took the first opportunity to get out of the lab, which turned out to be working in the traffic division. Right place, right time—I'm a blessed human being."

With the enthusiasm most of us reserve for sports or shopping, Guckert now entertains himself by dreaming of the many technologies that either are now, or soon may be, helping to alleviate the gridlock: monorails, high-definition computer simulations, generator-powered cameras for traffic counts ("We took shots of 250,000 license plates in 36 hours to study the entire 325-mile stretch of I-81," he effuses), high-occupancy toll lanes,

elevated roadways, express busways, changes in driving times and patterns, and what he calls "teleworking."

"Imagine a company where 50 employees had access to the Internet at home and telecommuted one day a week," Guckert says. "That's 50 fewer cars on the roadway during rush hour. Now multiply it company after company. Or work at home from 7 to 10 a.m. and then come into the office for five hours. By 'teleworking,' using computers, this will have a positive impact in the future."

Guckert's also an advocate for public transportation. He'll tell you that getting commuters to give up their cars isn't so tough—it just takes a little innovation.

"What people want in transit service is reliability and frequency," he says. "Consider the real-time bus stops being introduced in Montgomery County. You put a Global Positioning System unit in the buses, tie them to a reader board that tells you when the next bus is coming.

You know it's a 1:40 bus; the board says, 'Arriving in one minute,' or 'it just left, next bus in 10 minutes.' You're going to see more and more of this type of system." Which will mean more ridership, he says.

AND THE SOLUTIONS FOR BALTIMORE'S gridlock?

"In 25 years, we will have planned or be in the process of actually double-decking the roadways, as they are doing in Tampa," says Guckert. "There's been talk about putting in a monorail or a high-speed train system in the median of I-95. I think you'll see more of that as time goes on, more elevated bus ways and elevated toll roads in the middle of the Beltway, or of I-83."

## Build it, and they will come, says Guckert: "Traffic is a symbol of prosperity..."

One metro-area project The Traffic Group has been involved in recently is in Howard County, where a new town center, Maple Lawn Farms, is being developed at Route 29 and MD 216, near the Johns Hopkins



Applied Physics Lab. "After we did an impact study, we came up with recommendations, one of which was to set up a transit center and to make the community transit-friendly," says Guckert. "They will be tying into the local Howard County bus system so residents can find their way to downtown Columbia and get rides directly to the applied physics lab, to the Silver Spring metro station."

But motorists shouldn't get their hopes up that rush-hour will get much better as a result of new highways and mass-transit innovations. Build it, and they will come, says Guckert: "Traffic is a symbol of prosperity. We're never going to get rid of it. In 25 years, instead of the rush hour, we'll have a rush two-and-a-half hours."

**The Traffic Group, Inc.** is a leading Traffic Engineering and Transportation Planning specialty firm headquartered in the State of Maryland, with Project Offices in other states. The firm provides consultation on all aspects of a project dealing with the movement of vehicles and pedestrians to, from and within the confines of a specified site or through a defined area. Services include, but are not limited to, traffic engineering and transportation planning studies, expert testimony, roadway and parking lot design, and data collection services. Any one or a variety of services may be utilized throughout various phases of a project.



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