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UMNews



New online video game from U of M gives high school students insight into engineering and transportation field



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A new traffic control online game developed by the University of Minnesota's Intelligent Transportation Systems (ITS) Institute and Web Courseworks lets high school students try their hand at working in the engineering and transportation field.

"Gridlock Buster" is a traffic control game that incorporates tools and ideas that traffic control engineers use in their everyday work. Players must pass a series of levels while acquiring specific skills in exercising control and fixing situations in a simulated environment. To play "Gridlock Buster," go to <http://www.its.umn.edu/trafficcontrolgame>

For example, a player might need to manage a high volume of traffic passing through an intersection, where long lines form if vehicles don't get enough green-light time. The more drivers are delayed, the more frustrated they get – causing the game's "frustration meter" to rise. Sound effects and animation simulate cars honking and drivers' fists shaking to illustrate the realistic results of backed-up traffic queues.

The game is based on work by Chen-Fu Liao, the ITS Institute's education systems engineer and staff member in the U of M's Department of Civil Engineering. The goal is to provide a fun way to engage students in the traffic engineering field, teach what is involved in traffic grid management and make transportation interesting and relevant.

"Kids are really into games, especially online games. We think creating a game like Gridlock Buster is a great way to engage them and get them interested in engineering and transportation," said Max Donath, director of the ITS Institute and a professor in the U of M's Department of Mechanical Engineering. "The best way to learn is by playing."

On Monday, July 20 11th and 12th graders from around the Twin Cities area will partake in a demonstration of the game with ITS researchers from 1-3 p.m. in 24 Lind Hall, 207 Church Street S.E., Minneapolis. On Wednesday, July 22 from 8:45-9:30 a.m., eighth to 10th graders from Leech Lake Indian Reservation will partake in a similar demo (as part of the U of M's Summer Transportation Institute, funded by the Federal Highway Administration) in room 314 of the Mechanical Engineering Building, 111 Church Street S.E., Minneapolis.

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