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UT to restrict 24th Street access

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The stretch of 24th Street, currently blocked off for construction of the new Norman Hackerman Building, will remain closed to car traffic during business hours as part of a larger effort to make central campus more pedestrian-friendly, officials said Wednesday.

Jeri Baker, assistant director of Parking and Transportation Services, said the decision was prompted by a traffic study the University commissioned through Walker Parking Consultants. The study, which monitored vehicular and foot traffic in the area during November and January, recommended limited access for safety reasons.

"[The study] prompted us to ask what do we need to do to keep the area safe," Baker said.

Baker said except for a bike lane, the area would be closed off by gates to all but UT vehicles, but after business hours and on weekends access would be restored to pre-construction levels. She said the decision fits into the long-term plans to make Speedway Street into a completely pedestrian mall.

"We just sort of see this as sort of the first step in that," Baker said.

David Rea, director of the Office of Campus Planning and Facilities Management, said the Student Activity Center being built next to Gregory Gymnasium was one example of the master plan continuing to guide development.

"The master plan was completed over a dozen years ago. However, those recommendations which remain valid are followed for each project," Rea said in an e-mail.

Less visible is the constant maintenance and small-scale work done by UT's Project Management & Construction Services division. Bill Throop, director of the division, said that the group handles renovation projects under \$2 million and new construction under \$1 million.

"Generally, what we're doing in the buildings replaces something old with something that's new and more efficient," Throop said, listing examples such as new roofing and electrical systems.

Michael Holleran, head of historic preservation and associate professor at the School of Architecture, said the master plan hovered somewhere between a set of guidelines and strict rules.

"To some extent it's a vision, 'This is what we could do, this is what we should do,'" said Holleran. "And to some extent, it's concrete."



Karina Jacques/The Daily Texan

Engineers work at UT's new science building on 24th Street and Speedway this Wednesday. The street will remain closed to cars during business hours to make campus more pedestrian friendly.

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Holleran said the plan called for two main changes – the “pedestrianization” of Speedway and refurbishment of the East Mall. He was hesitant to define which buildings on campus were immune to future changes and which were expendable.

“The thing as a whole is what has meaning,” he said.

Holleran said that while campus outside the 40 Acres held more potential for change, the central area has reached a point of maturation.

“It’s important not just to think in a green field to learn how to add to the density without thinking that we need to start by scrapping,” Holleran said.

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