



Consultant returns to University with sample bus

Survey to be released next week

Ellen Zielinski - Contributing Writer

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Patrick Duhon got a surprise Wednesday afternoon.

Instead of regular CATS transportation, Duhon, undeclared freshman, was picked up by a 60-foot, articulated bus.

"I was definitely confused," he said.

The bus was brought to campus by Mitch Skyer, president and senior consultant of Solstice Transportation Consulting, on his second visit to the University. It is a sample of the buses Student Government and the office of Parking, Traffic and Transportation hope to have by fall 2009.

Articulated means the bus bends in the middle. It is more than 20 feet longer than the largest CATS buses the University uses. It has a capacity of around 125 students with standing room that can hold anywhere from 35-50 people, Skyer said.

Though he said the University isn't likely to invest in a fleet of these giant buses, it may try to have a few "60-footers" along with regular 40-foot buses.

"We would send one [60-foot bus] on the Tigerland route, and one on the Greek route on a scoop right before classes on a scoop to try and get everyone, and then send one [smaller bus] right after to get any late students," Skyer said. Duhon, who lives in Southgate Towers, said he has high hopes for the potential "scoop" system.

"It should fix some of the problems in the morning," Duhon said. "I'm at the last stop and when the bus gets there it is always full of people."

A survey asking students what they want in a transportation system will be put out by the beginning of next week and will only be open for a week, said Gary Graham, Parking, Traffic and Transportation director.

An open contract will be provided for companies to bid on with a list of specifications aligned with data collected from the survey. Skyer said it is important to get a broad base of opinions in order to make sure students are getting what they want.

He said the company who wins the bid would likely purchase new buses to fit University specifications. There would be no limitation to their use, potentially allowing the buses to be used for gameday transportation in addition to traditional services.



GRANT GUTIERREZ

Students file into a Nova bus Wednesday that may be used in the fall semester.



Graham said the Parking, Traffic and Transportation office is going before the Student Required Fee Committee, and the amount student fees will increase depends on the survey's answers. The increase will pay for a balance between what students want and how much they are willing to pay for it, he said.

"We started by asking what you would want in a bus if you had a blank check," Graham said. "Now our general goal is to maximize service hours within projected route."

The bus was driven on all the routes Wednesday to make sure it would make every turn, and a spontaneous round of applause broke out as the bus slowly made a 180-degree turn around the circle between the Journalism Building and Cox auditorium.

"This reminds me of a Disney ride," said K.D. Linkous, assistant director of residential life and member of the working group for the mass transit study.

---Contact Ellen Zielinski at ezielski@isureveille.com