



Transit consultant rides campus buses, notes suggestions Skyer will return in a month

Adam Duvernay - Contributing Writer

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Mitch Skyer jerked in his seat Friday afternoon as a Capitol Area Transit System bus pulled onto Fieldhouse Drive.

As the bus lumbered down its Tigerland route, the consultant from Atlanta asked students about their experiences with CATS and logged the bus stops on a handheld GPS.

Because complications with hourly rates and growing dissatisfaction among students have risen, the University has called in the expertise of Skyer, a consultant from the Solstice Transportation Group.

Skyer arrived Wednesday and left early Sunday after spending four days evaluating the University's bus system and collecting feedback from students. The short trip was the first step in the plan to rebuild the University transit system.

The University paid Skyer's company \$41,000 for his services. Student Government paid \$40,000 and the Office of Parking, Traffic and Transportation paid for the rest.

After meeting with SG on Wednesday night students gathered in the Caddo Room of the Student Union on Thursday afternoon and Friday morning to meet Skyer.

Students slipped in and out during the two and a half hour meetings. Armed with both complaints and suggestions, the students dominated the conversation.

"I wasn't sure if taking the bus was going to get me to campus on time," said Jacob Stout, mass communication freshman, to Skyer.

Stout said he would like to see more frequent service with buses arriving every 10 to 15 minutes.

Isabel Blum, communication disorders junior, said she was frustrated with the infrequency of the day-to-day routes.

"I'm interested in getting this bus system working," Blum said to Skyer. "That's why I'm here."



MAGGIE BOWLES / The Daily Reveille

Mitch Skyer, an Atlanta consultant for the Solstice Transportation Group, takes a ride on a CATS bus Friday afternoon as he logged stops with a GPS. During his visit he also fielded suggestions for transit improvement from students in the Union.



Gary Graham, director of parking, traffic and transportation, sat alongside Skyer to help answer questions and talk to students about their suggestions.

“Nothing is off the table,” Graham said. “Where they will go, what they will look like, what will be on them. At this point anything is possible.”

Graham, who has been both a driver and a manager of bus systems in the past, said he has been working on solving the transit problem for some time and is ready to rebuild the system from the ground up.

During the forums, the idea of bringing in a new company to replace CATS was a popular option. By hiring a company that would have to make a serious investment in the University, Graham said students could expect greater accountability in service.

“CATS is a not-for-profit organization. If we brought in another company they would be for profit, and that’s the biggest hammer we would hold over their head,” Graham said.

After a few meetings with University officials following the Friday forum, Skyer took the Tigerland route to assess its efficiency.

He spoke with students at Tigerland about the route and how they would like to see it improved.

“More buses would make it better,” said Setoya Parker, biology senior. “Anything to help with the overcrowding.”

During his stay, Skyer rode buses along the Tigerland, Highland/Burbank and Greek routes.

“The challenges are real,” Skyer said. “I’ve seen a lot of things that I’ve heard. But, I don’t want to make a quick judgment.”

Skyer said he would like to see more flexible express routes serviced by more buses during peak hours.

Skyer and Graham spent time Saturday sitting in Baton Rouge game day traffic. Skyer said he was impressed with the traffic and wants to find a practical way to get buses to remote lots on Saturdays.

“This was a great start,” said Skyer. “There were a lot of terrific ideas from students and the administration.”

Skyer will return in about a month for more meetings with University officials. He said he expects to have more concrete solutions ready by that time.

Contact Adam Duvernay at aduvernay@lsureveille.com