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## LSU seeks bids for buses

Price hikes fuel demand for upgrade

- By [JORDAN BLUM](#)
- Advocate Capitol News Bureau
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LSU will start seeking bids by week's end on a new, expanded bus service that features plenty of technology perks and more environmentally friendly fuels, university officials said.

The move is caused by a desire to modernize bus services and is also a response to large price increases last year by the Capital Area Transit System —CATS — that has served the LSU area for more than 30 years, said Gary Graham, LSU director of parking, traffic and transportation.

“If we're going to pay more, we ought as well have all these nice things,” Graham said. “We're hoping it'll improve the bus services significantly.”

The goal is to select a new bus system contractor in March and have the services in place before the beginning of the fall semester, he said. CATS can still bid on the contract.

The major catch is that LSU students will have to pay whatever are the increased costs.

Students currently pay a \$44-per-semester fee for buses. Any changes will not be known until a new contractor is chosen.

LSU Student Government President Colorado Robertson said he believes students will accept some small fee increases as long as the bus services significantly improve.

But any fee changes would go before the students for a vote, he said.

“We definitely want better bus services,” Robertson said. “It takes more cars off the road and it helps alleviate campus parking.”

A lot of students currently complain about buses not being on time and poor bus driver attitudes, Robertson said. As a result, many students initially try out the buses and quickly revert back to driving their own cars to school, he said.

One new technology feature would include global-positioning systems on the buses so students can keep track of where the buses are on computers or cell phones, Robertson said.

Last summer, CATS upped its hourly price for bus services at LSU from about \$60 to about \$83, Graham said.

CATS officials have cited creased diesel fuel costs as the primary reason for the changes.

Because LSU's student-fee budget for bus services was not increased, LSU had to cut back from 21 CATS buses to only 12 in recent months, Graham said, severely limiting bus services on and around campus.

Southern University's CATS costs increased last year and Baton Rouge Community College opted to cancel its CATS contract.

Graham said LSU hopes to use 25 buses for its new system.

Georgia-based Solstice Transportation Consulting put together a "Mass Transit Operations Master Plan" for LSU that was completed in December.

The route recommendations focus on more frequency to Tigerland and the fraternity and sorority housing areas.

The report also encourages more expanded routes into downtown, the Garden District and the Perkins Road/South Acadian areas.

If one-fourth of LSU students reduced their driving by 10 miles per day because of bus services, those students would easily reduce their driving by about 10 million miles per year, the report states.

Bus types would be mostly heavy-duty, 40-foot buses and smaller, more agile "cutaway" buses, Graham and Robertson said.

But the report also suggests one large, 60-foot, articulated bus that bends in the middle and carries 125 people.

"There will be a strong sense of identity with the 'Tiger Monster' Shuttle," the report states. "This will be a uniquely LSU bus."

The monster shuttle would be perfect for students who wait until the last minute before classes start when everyone tries to get on the buses at once. Robertson said. The larger shuttle would mean fewer students are left waiting for the next ride.

"Current and future passengers of LSU Transit are willing to pay for a service that meets their needs," the report states. "This service must be safe, reliable, marketed well and often, and designed to meet the ever-changing needs of the passenger community."

Buses could also incorporate advertising to manage costs.

Alternative fuel options include biodiesel fuels, diesel/electric hybrids and compressed natural gas, according to the report.

Out of nearly 3,000 LSU student survey participants, 52 percent said they use LSU buses often.

More than 52 percent described the existing bus service as “poor” or “needing improvement.” Only 7 percent felt the service was “good.”

As for fee increases, about one-third of students in the survey said they opposed any increase. The rest would support a measured increase as long as the services significantly improve, according to the report.

The report suggests that while LSU should contract out for bus services, LSU should also start a campus transportation review committee and a transit operations board to manage the daily relationship between the bus service and the school.

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