



Bus consultant returns to campus with proposal for fall '09

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Students looking for a change in the University's transportation system have something to look forward to in fall 2009.

Mitch Skyer, president and senior transportation consultant for Solstice Transportation Consulting, returned for his third visit Wednesday with results from a survey given to students at the beginning of November.

Skyer said almost 3,000 students took the survey, which is considered a good response.

"It confirmed that students want more buses, more often," Skyer said. "We want to start with more predictable bus times and have a higher frequency."

Among other questions, the survey asked where students would like routes to travel in addition to existing routes.

"The biggest change is most likely going to be a northern route," Skyer said.

Skyer said a large portion of students feel that a route into the Garden District is necessary, so he created one in his proposal that will cover that area and travel into part of Capital Heights.

Survey results also showed students on the Tigerland route are very unsatisfied with bus service as it is, and Skyer said he has a possible solution. In his proposal, the South Campus route will include an extra Tigerland pickup at peak hours.

"Basically, a large bus will pick up students about 15 minutes before class time, and then a smaller bus will follow a couple minutes later from the South Campus route to pick up any students that missed [the first bus]," he said.

The survey also asked students what they would be willing to spend more money on, and many student voiced their opinions about being environmentally friendly.

"We also found that students are willing to pay more for greener buses," Skyer said.

He said the best way to accomplish making the transportation program better for the environment is to improve the system so students will be more likely to take alternative transportation.

"If we can get people out of their cars and into buses, it reduces the amount of people on the road, and it makes a greener campus," Skyer said.

Gary Graham, Parking, Traffic and Transportation director, said the transportation fee needs to be increased, but the amount will depend on several factors.

"It is my understanding that anything new, such as GPS tracking of buses, will have to be voted on in the spring semester," he said.

Skyer said to maintain a high standard, he proposes a committee be held twice a semester, or more often if needed. It would be made of students, faculty, drivers and the contractor and would deal with any problems that arise.

"How do you deal with change?" Skyer asked. "It's not a knee-jerk response — you will just fix one problem and create two."

Graham said the proposal is in final draft stage and was present to several committees last Thursday.

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"We will fine tune ... 5 percent [of the proposal] in the next three weeks," Graham said.

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Graham said several companies have already been contacted with some of the general aspects of what the University is looking for, and five or six companies have expressed interest.

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