



Associated Students of Western Washington University
Vice President for Student Life

MEMO

To: AS Board of Directors
From: Jämin Agosti, VP for Student Life
Re: Western Student Shuttle Redesign
Date: October 25, 2010

I. BACKGROUND

The Western Student Shuttle (WSS), formerly known as the Late Night Shuttle, has seen several substantial operational changes for this academic year including the addition of all-day Sunday routes, additional express shuttles to the Fairhaven Transit station, and, last year, the purchase of two additional buses from Whatcom Transportation Authority (WTA).

The Western Student Shuttle program has incredible visibility and ridership which is set to only increase with the new Sunday routes. Since the inception of the shuttle, the Western Student Transportation office has seen increasing ridership year over year:

“ The Late Night Shuttle carried 31,154 riders during the 2009-2010 academic year... There was an average of 916 riders per week, and 130 riders per day... Total ridership by quarter was 10,996 for fall, 9,680 for winter, and 10,478 for spring.

Excerpt from "Annual Late Night Shuttle Report", Student Transportation Program

The WSS program provides extended bus service around the campus-area (similar to WTA's Blue Line service) in accordance with the approved fee language governing the student transportation fee. The program also provides crucial transportation and safety benefits during high traffic periods such as Halloween weekend and Memorial Day weekend, as well as throughout the rest of the academic year. This proposal aims to increase recognition of the WSS in order for it to become a more ingrained part of the student experience.

While the existence of the "Late Night Shuttle" tends to be common knowledge among a majority of the student population, the routes, schedules, pick-up locations, and the shuttles themselves tend to remain unknown or unnoticed.

The AS Alternative Transportation Coordinator is tasked with assessing the usage of the shuttle program, reporting on the program to the Board of Directors, and above all, advertising the

transportation program to students. As with many of our AS offices, advertising our programs can prove to be challenging. Transportation programs, however, face an additional slew of challenges. Bus schedules can be hard to understand or remember, our program is limited as to where routes and schedules can be posted, and very little resources are available for marketing. Beyond these challenges, our most powerful method of advertising has remained unutilized; the buses themselves.

The Student Transportation Fee program has purchased four model-year 1993 Gillig 30' coaches over the last several years. Two are former Skagit Valley Transit buses with white/green bodies, and two are former WTA buses with entirely white bodies. All four have "WWU Shuttle" markings on the roadside and curbside faces (please see included process book). These designs dramatically underutilize the coaches' advertising potential and can, in some cases, present an intimidating and unwelcoming environment.¹

II. PROPOSAL

Proposed Motion A: Move to approve NTE \$18,000 from the _____ account for the purchase and installation of full-bus vinyl wraps, including window vinyl, for the four (4) student shuttles.

Proposed Motion B: Move to approve NTE \$12,100 from the account for the purchase and installation of full-bus vinyl wraps for the four (4) student shuttles.

Proposed Motion C: Move to approve NTE \$6,800 from the account for the purchase and installation of half-bus vinyl wraps for the four (4) student shuttles.

This proposal attempts to increase WSS ridership and recognition by utilizing our four shuttle coaches to their full potential as well as giving them a safer, more welcoming appearance. The proposal will modify our coaches in order for them to be:

- 1) attractive,
- 2) consistent,
- 3) visible during late-night routes,
- 4) recognized by the student population, and
- 5) identifiable back to the University and the Associated Students.

Vinyl wraps are the most cost-effective method for changing the appearance of a vehicle. Large sheets of vinyl adhesive are printed and installed on a vehicle using specialized materials and processes. Usage, exposure degree, lifetime expectations, and vinyl quality are taken into account when designing, contracting, and installing vinyl wraps. All bids for this project were based on WTA's requirements for their shuttle coaches and are held to the same warranty standards.²

The proposed draft designs for the shuttles have also been developed with the five goals

¹ Several students have commented on the current designs as "scary" or "intimidating," especially during the darker night routes.

² The lowest bidding contractor, which the pricing in this document is based on, specified a 5 year parts and labor warranty for vertical exposure.

mentioned above in mind. The WSS was observed running its Sunday and late-night routes, as were WTA shuttles with more intricate and detailed vinyl wraps. It was important that designs could be viewed and recognized not only during daylight conditions but also in dark or streetlamp-lit environments. It was determined that darker colors tended to be indistinguishable from each other during late-night routes, but lighter colors were viewable from modest distances during dark and streetlamp-lit situations. These findings were taken into consideration during the development of the draft shuttle designs (please see included process book).

III. CONCERNS

The Student Transportation Fee expires at the end of the 2011-2012 academic year and will come back to the students for a vote of renewal. If the fee renewal vote fails, the encoding of WTA passes on Western cards as well as the operation of the Western Student Shuttle will both be discontinued.

Concerns have been expressed about the lifetime of the four model-year 1993 coaches we currently own. As of this report, all four coaches are operational. If the fee is renewed, however, there are reserves for the purchase of additional coaches. The purchase of a brand new coach has been discussed and reserves have been set aside for this contingency. A new coach could be relatively easily painted or vinyl wrapped to match a design without incurring much additional cost. The funds for the purchase of new coaches would come directly from the Student Transportation Fee reserves.

The price tag can be hard to swallow, and understandably so. I urge the Board of Directors to consider the total cost of this proposal in several different manners. First, it is important to look at our Rainy Day Fund, Combined Fund Balance, and rollover Operating Budget funds while keeping in mind the purpose of these accounts as well as the responsible level of funding for each. Second, the advertising industry measures not only the entire cost of a campaign but also the cost-per-impression for each advertisement. With this project's massive potential audience and the 5-year minimum lifetime for the wraps, the cost-per-impression is comparable to that of a single on-campus banner. And finally, consider the costs of this proposal over its 5-year lifetime. Proposed Motion B presents a yearly cost of only \$605 per shuttle for a service that operates every day, 39 hours a week.

IV. BENEFITS

The greatest benefit is the full utilization of our coaches as advertisement for the WSS program.

The Associated Students and the University would also gain from this proposal as the coaches will highlight both organizations. The buses will be visible not only to 31,000 student riders annually, but tens of thousands of pedestrians and motorists that represent students, staff, faculty, and community members.

From a marketing standpoint, vehicle advertisements are extremely cost effective when compared to more traditional forms of advertisement. Unlike Facebook the buses cannot be turned off. Unlike a poster they can't be rained off, ripped off, stolen, or become victims of poster-blindness. Riders,

motorists, and pedestrians are captive audiences that gravitate towards creative and captivating designs. How often have you been driving or walking through Bellingham and noticed an interesting bus advertisement or design?

The student body and the Associated Students also benefit from the clear and obvious molding of the AS logo into the design. The AS represent students interests, student activities, and most importantly, student-funded initiatives throughout campus. The WSS program is funded with student dollars and is a collaboration between the Associated Students and the University's Transportation Office.

V. CONCLUSION

I submit Proposed Motion B as the recommended motion. Based on the evidence above, I believe it presents the most cost effective method for advertising the WSS program and meets this proposal's goals by creating attractive and consistent shuttles that will be recognizable by the student population, identifiable back to the University and the Associated Students and clearly visible during late-night routes.