

MEMORANDUM

TO: UCLA Undergraduate Students Association Council
FROM: Erik Felix
Purva Kapshikar
Bailey Lai
DATE: May 31, 2022
SUBJECT: RE: Proposal for Referendum on Fare-Free Transit for Undergraduate Students

1. Introduction

The Graduate Students Association voted in 2020 to adopt the Bruin Grad Pass, a transit pass program that gives graduate students unlimited transit rides to seven local transit agencies serving Los Angeles (LA) County for a flat, quarterly tuition fee. Such a program is often called “Unlimited Access” (UA). (Brown et. al, 2001b). Undergraduate students could have a similar program; in order to achieve this, undergraduate students would need to approve the program through a referendum vote. We believe that the Undergraduate Students Association should propose a referendum to transform the existing BruinGO program into a fare-free transit pass program similar to Bruin Grad Pass and those at other universities. To reinforce the program, Metro BikeShare and Metro Micro services should be included in the program and the cost of on-campus parking should be charged as a daily rate for all non-low income students. The benefits and costs of UA are outlined in this memo.

2. Background

Originally built as a commuter school in peripheral, rural Westwood, much of the land surrounding the original UCLA campus became parking lots in the mid-20th century, reflecting the commuting nature of its student population and the car-centric growth of Los Angeles. By the 1990s, UCLA and surrounding Westwood had become a hub of economic activity and demand for student dorms began to increase (Miller, 1997). This was reflected in the changing nature of the student commutes, with larger numbers of students no longer driving to campus. UCLA Professor Donald Shoup remarked how, despite the university offering \$65 per month for vanpools, there was no equivalent subsidy for bikers, walkers, or transit riders that made up an increasing portion of the student body (Brown & Shoup, 1997).

Even with significant opposition from the administration and UCLA Transportation, widespread student and faculty support led to \$1 million in funding for a UA fare-free transit pilot program named BruinGO which began in the 2000-2001 school year (Shoup, 2001; Tsai, 2002). The program has since been discontinued. Today, UCLA has the second most parking spots of any university in America, behind Texas A&M (Shoup, 2018), and the waitlist for student parking continues to vary between 1,000-4,000 (Frankel, 2015; Miller, 1998).

3. Why undergraduate students should tax themselves for fare-free public transit

For students, UA offers increased mobility, reduced housing costs, increased student resources and financial aid, and improved access to education.

Increased Mobility and Access

UA offers students unlimited transit rides, extending their understanding of the city, and unlocking its career and recreational opportunities (Mondschein, et al, 2013). This is particularly beneficial to the 51 percent of undergraduates who are not from LA County and the 33 percent who are not from the Southern California region (UCLA, n.d.).

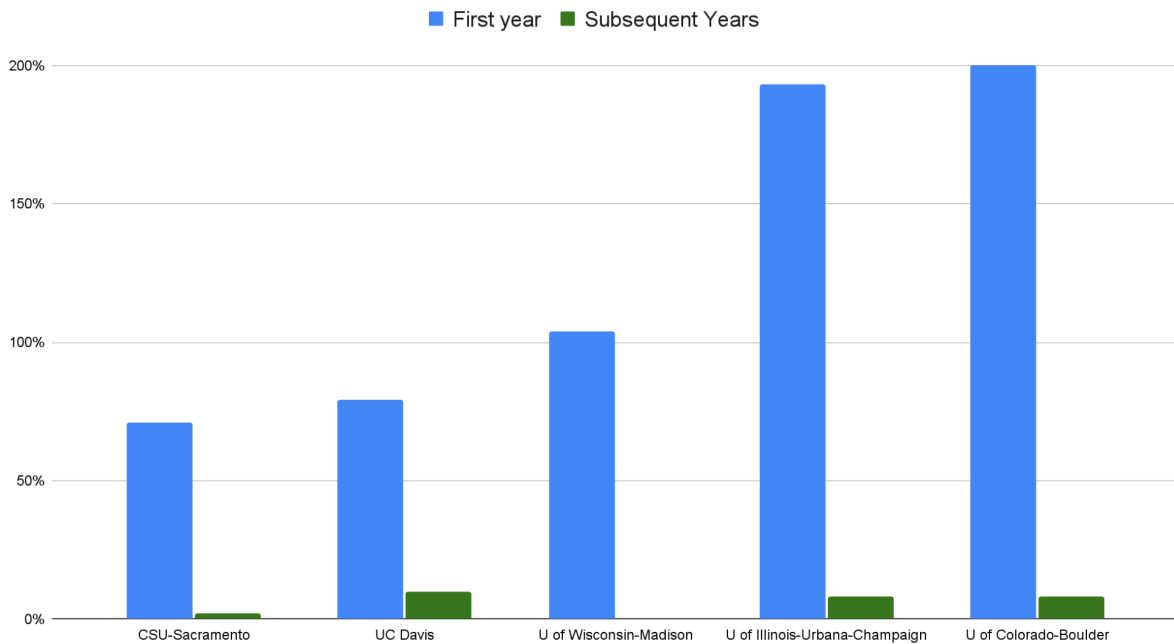
Reduced Cost of Living and Increased Financial Aid

UA reduces the cost of living for students. With UA, students no longer have to pay for a car, its maintenance, or parking permits — reducing overall transportation costs (Brown et. al, 2001b). Students can choose to live in buildings and neighborhoods away from campus where rents are cheaper and transit is convenient (Brown et. al, 2001a). A 2017 report found that UCLA only provides on-campus housing to 46 percent of undergraduates (University of California Office of the President, 2017). UA gives undergrads the flexibility to meet their housing needs in ways that UCLA currently cannot. Since transportation and housing costs would be reduced, UCLA would then be able to disburse financial aid to more students while still fully funding their essential needs. Long-term, this would result in less student debt (Brown et. al, 2001a).

Increased Access to Education

In 2015, 1,000 students were placed on the waitlist for parking permits (Frankel, 2015). The difficulty of driving and parking makes students either late or forgo class altogether (Rivera, 2015; Burnham, 2016; Andreski, 2022). UA encourages mode shifts to transit, increasing parking supply for students who need to drive to campus (Brown et. al, 2003; Nuworsoo, 2005). In BruinGO's first year, student solo driving decreased by 26 percent (Brown et. al, 2003).

Change in Student Transit Ridership After UA



*University of Wisconsin-Madison data for subsequent years was not available. Source: Brown, et al (2001)

Increased Student Resources

The decrease in solo driving allows for funds and land committed to parking to be reallocated to more student resources and amenities. Funds could be reallocated to extend existing services such as library and dining hours and tutoring. Land could be reappropriated to build more housing, recreational and green spaces, or study facilities. Research shows that undergrads who live on-campus experience improved grades, quality of life, social belonging, and extracurricular engagement (Watanabe, 2022).

4. Distribution of benefits

UA offers benefits to UCLA, local transit agencies, society, and the environment.

UCLA

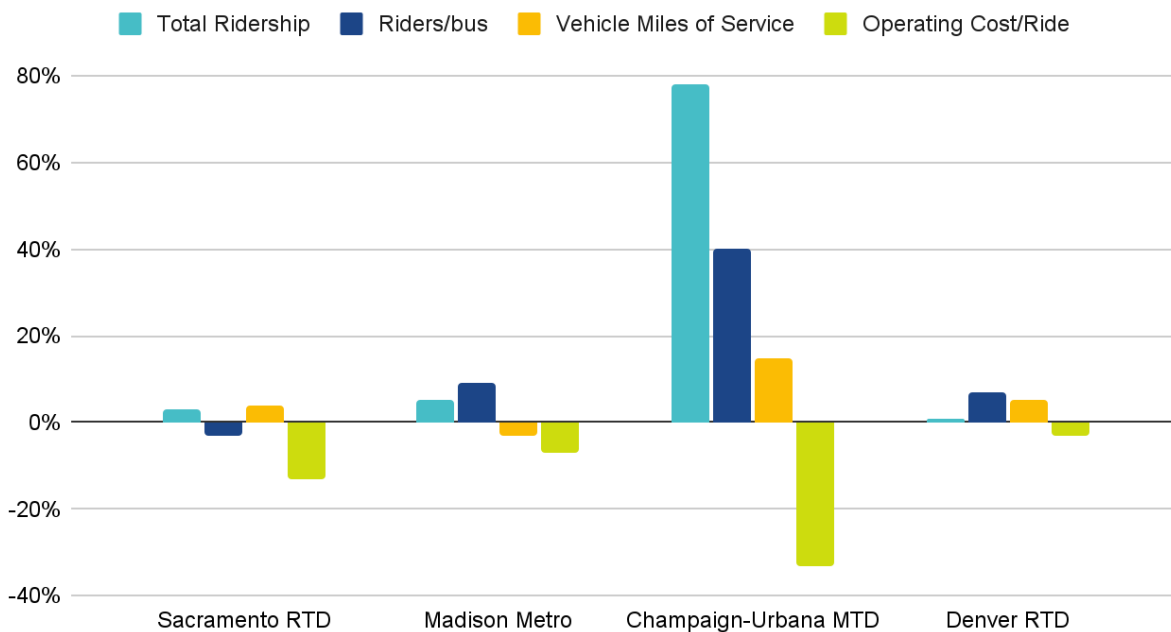
UA reduces the demand for parking in a university. This can lead to the removal of existing spaces or the postponing of new parking construction, as the university can meet parking demand with its current parking supply (Brown et. al, 2001b). This saves money for universities: for instance, the pilot BruinGO program saved UCLA \$2.7 million/year by reducing parking demand by at least 1,020 spaces (Brown et. al, 2003). The cost of purchasing these transit passes in a group also reduces costs for universities. As UA reduces the costs for students to

attend UCLA, it may serve as an incentive for choosing to enroll, especially for those students who do not intend to drive (Nuworsoo, 2005).

Transit Agencies

UA is beneficial to transit agencies as it increases ridership, provides guaranteed revenue, and improves overall service (Brown et. al, 2001b). The spike in student transit ridership reduces transit costs: specifically, it reduces operating costs per ride, operating subsidies per ride, and total operating subsidies (Brown et. al, 2001b). As UA is typically a card-based system, it avoids dealing with cash fares, reducing dwell time and potential conflict (NACTO, n.d.). This more efficient performance improves service for all riders, regardless of their affiliation with UCLA.

Change in Transit Agency Efficiency Indicators After UA



Source: Brown, et al (2001)

Society and the Environment

UA also has broader societal and environmental impacts. UA reduces vehicle trips, vehicle miles traveled, and vehicle emissions. Reduced congestion and pollution are social and environmental benefits that have both local and regional impact. The reduced vehicular congestion can also improve transit service (Brown et. al, 2001b). The environmental impacts are particularly important for commuter schools like UCLA, where transportation can comprise up to 50 percent of total carbon footprint (Brown et. al, 2001b). Long-term, UA familiarizes young adults with transit at an age when they are developing lifestyle habits, increasing the likelihood that they use transit after college (Andreski, 2022).

5. Distribution of costs

The costs of UA are shared mostly between students, UCLA, transit agencies, and transit riders.

Students

UA raises student tuition; for instance, the Bruin Grad Pass is currently \$25 a quarter (Rausa, 2020). Those students who do not use transit may feel as though they are subsidizing other students' transit rides. In actuality, non-drivers have always been subsidizing drivers' driving and parking (Shoup, 2017). For instance, driving imposes hidden costs through rents, congestion, and land use burdens that this fee would capture. Additionally, the proposed draft referendum covers the added UA tuition fee for undergraduate students on financial aid, meaning 54 percent of undergraduate students would not incur a charge.

UCLA

UCLA would incur costs for program administration and paying fees for undergraduates receiving financial aid. Based on our estimates, though, this increased cost is small compared to the cost of building parking. Initial estimates to provide fare-free transit for tens of thousands of people at UCLA were \$1.3 to \$4.5 million. This was miniscule compared to the \$33 million UCLA spent on just Parking Structure 4's 1,000 parking spots (Miller, 1998; Brown & Shoup, 1999). In its inaugural year, BruinGO provided 1.4 million rides to 62,700 riders and cost UCLA \$2 per person a month (in 2022 dollars) (Brown et al. 2003). This is significantly less than the \$295 per month per space (in 2022 dollars) UCLA spends on the capital and operating costs for the 1,000 parking spaces in Parking Structure 4 (Miller, 1998; Brown & Shoup, 1999). Furthermore, the current cost of the Bruin Grad Pass is about \$10 per person a month. Based on these precedents, we would expect an undergraduate UA program to cost much less per student compared to new parking.

Transit Agencies

Many also argue that transit agencies will be overburdened, as they may experience overcrowding on transit. There may also be a potential need for more drivers, which has been a challenge for agencies to meet during the COVID-19 pandemic (Uranga, 2020). Though, the surge of revenue UA provides agencies could be used to offer more competitive wages to recruit and retain drivers.

Transit Riders

Agencies may modify their routes or schedules in order to better meet student demand, which may inconvenience other transit riders. These riders also may feel uncomfortable with overcrowding. However, students tend to have "non-traditional" schedules and fill up empty

seats, so any pressure they may exert on transit systems tends to be evenly dispersed throughout a day (Brown et. al, 2001b).

7. Recommendations

Propose a undergraduate referendum to enstate a fare-free transit program for students

For a nominal fee, undergraduate students are able to reap the personal benefits of increased mobility, reduced school costs, enhanced amenities, less student debt, and more accessible education. Additionally, undergraduates benefit from UA's greater societal and environmental benefits such as cleaner air, less vehicular congestion, and improved transit services. We propose the referendum adopt a similar design to Bruin Grad Pass. As the original BruinGO was deprecated due to its tie to UCLA parking fees and the resulting internal backlash, making the fare-free transit tied directly to student fees safeguards fare-free transit from the administration's hesitance to provide University-sourced funds.

Coordinate with LA Metro to offer Metro BikeShare and Metro Micro service with UA

Westwood is uniquely located in both a Metro BikeShare and Metro Micro service area. UA should incorporate these other Metro services into its program. There are four total Metro BikeShare stations in Westwood Village and on campus. Metro Micro offers on-demand rideshare to destinations within a specific service area (LA Metro, n.d.). Metro Micro and BikeShare provide direct access to destinations in ways that fixed route bus and rail transit cannot. One of the purposes of UA is to enhance student mobility. Including Metro BikeShare and Micro would achieve this in a more holistic manner.

Replace quarterly parking permits for daily parking rates for students who do not receive financial aid

To maximize the potential of UA, discontinue quarterly parking permits and charge students who do not receive financial aid a daily rate to park on campus. This changes the existing marginal cost of each car trip to campus for quarterly permit holders from practically zero to the cost of the daily parking rate (Shoup, 2018). Conversely, with UA, the cost of each bus trip will change from the fare rate to zero. Riders can ride the bus as often as they please at no additional cost (Shoup, 2018). This makes transit use more appealing and driving less appealing. Still, quarterly parking permits should continue to be made available for low income students who receive financial aid. Low income students are three times more likely to live at home and have longer commutes to school (Department of Education, 2018). Charging a price for parking that reflects its cost will encourage students who find it convenient to take transit, bike, or walk to campus to do so. UA facilitates these mode shifts while giving low income students the ability to drive, if needed, meeting the program's overarching goal of improving student mobility.

8. Conclusion

UCLA was the most applied to undergraduate school in the country last year (Moody, 2021). The cost of attending UCLA is becoming less financially feasible with tuition increasing between 10 to 21 percent over the past ten years, depending on resident status (College Tuition Compare, n.d.). Furthermore, UCLA has 23,000 parking spaces for 72,000 people who are on campus each day (Rivera, 2015). UA will reduce the cost of an UCLA undergraduate degree and make Greater LA accessible to existing and future students. Additionally, charging parking on a daily basis for non-low income students allocates parking to students who need it most. UCLA is replacing former parking lots with high-density projects that offer no parking, such as Gayley Heights. These projects are helping UCLA become the first UC to guarantee on-campus housing to all undergraduate students (Watanabe, 2022). The University of California was founded on the idea that California should have a public university system that equally serves all students, regardless of their background (University of California, 2018). UCLA is committed to reaching carbon neutrality by 2025 (Hewitt and Mok, 2015). UA coupled with the proper parking pricing strategies achieves both goals.

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10. Writer’s Digest Score

1. Introduction

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2. Background

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The Writer's Diet

- be-verbs
- zombie nouns
- prepositions
- ad-words
- it, this, that, there

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 This document has 1803 eligible words.

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