Transportation master plan in the works

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University officials hope to remedy problems with parking, Aggie Shuttle service and other issues

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USU Facilities has teamed up with USU Student Services to come up with a plan to make getting to and around campus a little easier. The offices plan to hire a transportation planning expert in April who will take a closer look at travel patterns and outline a plan of action.

According to Jordy Guth, an architect and planner for the university, this plan has been years in the making. Student Services joined the Facilities office in the process last fall after confronting multiple student complaints regarding the state of campus transportation.

“Students are our clients and the reason we are here,” she said. “I think the students are going to be a huge driver of this plan. We really want to make it all inclusive. It's going to be a very open process. I think that's really the only way to do planning.”

USU Student Association President Doug Fiefia credits myVoice as a helpful tool in bringing these issues to light.

“Before myVoice was created, it was just disgruntled students, and I was one of them,” he said. “Now we can go to students who have Parking and Transportation concerns and say, ‘We're spending this money to find out more, and this is going to change because of your voice.’”

Guth said the goal is to outline a plan that will remedy problems seen regarding parking, the Aggie Shuttle service, bicyclists, pedestrian crowding and other issues. It will also outline a travel demand management program, which will increase safety and efficiency of travel.

“We're not sure where we're going to end up, but that's what the plan is for,” she said.

Student convenience won't be the only factor in the making of the plan. Sustainability is also a major player, Guth said, especially with the valley's air quality. She hopes to enhance and better integrate bike and pedestrian travel as well as other non-motorized forms of transportation.

“We have the President's Climate Commitment that has given us a real goal and charge to become carbon neutral,” she said. “Transportation, just by commuters, accounts for 23 percent of our carbon footprint, so we know it is a big chunk of where we need to be working.”

This is not intended to be a quick fix, but a way to map out solutions. When a planning professional is selected, intensive data gathering and studies will be conducted regarding the multiple transportation entities on campus. This will include traffic counts, bike counts and surveying areas of heaviest traffic.

Facilities will also call on the expertise of other local groups such as Cache Valley Transit District and the Cache Metropolitan Planning Organization. To ensure students are also involved in this process, representatives from Aggie Blue Bikes, Campus Recreation, Housing and Residence Life, the Students for Sustainability Club and several other organizations will be present on the decision making board.

Guth plans for the data gathering and analysis process to take nine months to a year to complete. A master plan will then be made and problem-solving projects will be prioritized.

The exact cost of this effort will not be determined until a private contractor is hired.

James Morales, vice president of Student Services, estimates it will cost between $90,000 and $100,000. Half of that, he said, will be paid for through the selective investment account, which are state funds set aside for university improvement. The other half will be funded with capital improvement dollars, which also come from the state every year to improve university infrastructure.

Morales said the money spent on this planning process will be well worth it.

“This is critically important for our university and our students,” he said. “One of the most pressing issues that students raise to me is parking and traffic on campus … We've never sat down and truly looked at it from holistic perspective to come up with a plan to solve the
issues. The impact of this study is pretty significant for our students' well-being and the campus community."

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