

Bus ridership continues to grow

New routes, Web site provide convenience; GV prepares to beat last year's numbers

By Jason Puscas

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Just shy of 2 million Grand Valley State University students

rode The Rapid last year, topping the former record of 1.59 million.

With rising prices for both gasoline and tuition burdening students this fall, the university is encouraging students to

continue to take advantage of the service. The bus system, which was expanded last year to

include an additional Allendale route, is free for students and can help alleviate the burden of fluctuating gas prices.

An average commute between the Pew and Allendale campuses at 20 miles per gallon would cost a student \$5.16 per trip, based on Monday's fuel prices.

This extra cost coupled with a weakening economy and elevated tuition costs is expected to yield yet another record

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ridership of The Rapid.

Use has steadily increased since GVSU launched its partnership with the Grand Rapids-based company in 1996, when ridership was about 5,300

per month. In 2007, the GVSU routes averaged about 275,000 rides per month.

In anticipation of even more

use this academic year, the university has contracted 19 buses to run the four routes — the GVSU off-campus shuttle, south campus shuttle, Campus Connector and the Center for Health Sciences shuttle.

Lisa Haynes, assistant vice president of Pew Campus Operations, is a university administrator trying to educate students on the benefits of using the bus system.

"When students ride the bus, it saves energy (by) not

using the gallons of gasoline, it helps them financially and it saves the environment," she said. "What we have done is taken on the initiative of wanting students to ride the bus and to take advantage of these opportunities."

GVSU has launched yet another service to help make riding the bus more convenient for students, a "Find the Route" option is now available via a link on GVSU's busing Web site.

"We have (a link) where people can ask 'how do I get to such-and-such location?'" Haynes said. "They submit the form (online) and we respond with route numbers and how to get there. While a relatively new program, we're getting about 150 requests a day."

Jim Bachmeier, vice president of finance at GVSU, recognizes the importance of keeping college affordable for students.

"When we think about keeping the cost of an education down, everyone is focused on tuition, obviously," he said. "But that is really just the beginning. If I can save you money by putting you on a bus instead of a car, if I can save you money by making more used books available at the bookstore, if we can save you money by offering a greater availability of classes and by streamlining curriculum so we can get you out a semester sooner, those are big cost aids."



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Ride: Students save money by taking the bus that has new routes for convenience.

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