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Making space: Students board the 48 bus to South campus apartments. With Grand Valley State University's growing population and an increase in students utilizing The Rapid, buses are often overcrowded.

Still competing for a seat

GV explores possibility of adapting routes for The Rapid

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On a typical weekday afternoon this semester, there are more than 100 students waiting at the Grand Valley State University Pew Campus bus station, all hoping to get a spot on the next 50. As the Campus Connector pulls around the corner, GVSU junior Craig Weaver subtly starts to push his way to the front of the crowd.

"It's not that bad in the morning, but in the afternoon it's worse," Weaver said. "All the seats are taken and the aisle is packed full of people standing. At least once every couple days, I have to wait for the next bus since the first one fills up. If there

is a chance I can get on the bus, I shove my way forward. I know it's rude, but I don't want to wait."

According to The Rapid, Route 50 has had the most substantial ridership increases, and demand currently outpaces capacity at peak operating hours. Higher enrollment at GVSU means more riders. Since 2009, bus ridership at GVSU has continually increased on Route 50, which connects the Allendale and Pew Campuses. In 2012, nearly 1.4 million riders used the Campus Connector—a 10 per-

cent increase from 2011.

"The transportation system provides an efficient, sustainable and cost effective alternative to bringing a car to campus," said Mark Rambo, manager of operations at the Pew Campus and Regional Centers.

Due to increased traffic, the Interurban Transit Partnership, which operates the Rapid system, has been investigating changes to the Lake Michigan Drive bus

**All the seats
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packed full...**

CRAIG WEAVER
JUNIOR

SEE TRANSIT ON A2



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Filled to the brim: Students exit the Rapid Campus Connector. The 50 bus route has grown more than any other route and during peak times demand for the buses exceed capacity. A study will be conducted to assess a possible change in the route.

TRANSIT

CONTINUED FROM A1

route. There will be a study starting in May 2014 to determine the feasibility of creating a new route, and Rambo said if it is approved, Route 50 would evolve into a 12-mile-long Laker Line.

The Rapid received a \$600,000 federal transportation planning grant in October 2011 to conduct the study, which will be completed in August 2014. The design firm URS Corporation, which has an of-

fice in Grand Rapids, will work with Rapid staff to determine the cost of the Laker Line, where the funding would come from, the exact route and alternate services or options. GVSU currently pays The Rapid about \$2.6 million a year for contracted services including the Campus Connector.

"Waiting for the next bus can really be a problem for students trying to get to class on time when they are downtown and have to get to Allendale or vice versa," Weaver said. "A bus driver

was talking to me the other day—he's been driving for two years—and said that since then, the buses have become a lot more packed."

The Laker Line would be part of a Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) system. BRT can include features such as dedicated lanes during rush hour traffic, higher frequency of service and upgraded stations.

"If the Campus Connector evolves into Bus Rapid Transit like the Silver Line, it will reduce travel times and improve the riding experience," Rambo said.

Currently there is no timeline to implement BRT in the Lake Michigan corridor, but routes can go from conceptual to operational in 5 to 10 years.

"I hadn't heard anything about the Laker Line yet," Weaver said. "If it means shorter waiting times for students, I think it's worth looking into, though. Something should be done to improve the current system. I'm curious about how much the Laker Line would cost and where the money would come from, but it could be a good idea."