



1. universal pass program (u-pass)

University and college transit passes - often referred to as “U-Passes,” “Eco-Passes,” or “Universal transit passes” – are partnership between public transit systems and universities or large institutions. These programs are a mutually beneficial way to increase transit ridership and offer greater mobility to students, faculty, and staff. Many universities are also motivated to develop U-Pass programs as part of environmental stewardship programs.

How it works

The cost of a U-Pass program typically is based on the number of trips taken by pass holders and the pre-determined cost per trip.

Transit and universities/colleges work together to create a U-Pass agreement. This agreement is typically formalized with a contract to ensure transit agencies are adequately reimbursed for ridership and universities are confident they benefit from the relationships through improved service and discounted rates.

Negotiations

- **Discounted per trip rates** : U-Pass programs almost always offer the university a discounted trip rate. The amount of the discount must balance the benefit of a large, bulk purchase with the actual cost of providing the service.
- **Actual trips taken by U-Pass holders** : The number of trips taken together with the fare determines the cost of the program, thus agreeing on how the number of trips taken is measured is critical. Depending on the type of fare collection system used by a transit agency, pass usage may be easily measured at the farebox. In other cases, U-Pass program can measure trip levels through surveys.
- **Escalation rates** : U-Pass programs are nearly always effective in increasing transit ridership. Consequently, program costs can increase substantially after the first year. Transit agencies and universities often negotiate escalation rates to ensure programs cost increases are manageable, especially in the early years of the program.

Funding

Most U-Pass programs involve some funding from users. U-Pass programs are usually funded by the university, either out of general or parking revenues, and/or from the student body through student fees. **Engaging students in program development and negotiations, therefore, is critical.** Key to success is to spread the costs of the trips over the entire university population so that the cost per person remains quite low. The reasoning behind the shared cost is that additional transit riders benefit drivers by reducing traffic and parking congestion. Universities also typically benefit financially through reduced or deferred demand for campus parking.

Other Considerations

- **Fraud** : Fraud prevention methods are an essential element of all U-Pass agreements, especially programs that allow riders to show or “flash” their student ID to the driver. Many programs tie the U-Pass to the student ID card and require students to affix brightly colored stickers each semester to show they are still enrolled in school. Other programs distribute passes each semester.
- **Complimentary Strategies** : While U-Pass programs tend to be affiliated with bus service, in most cases they are part of a broader multi-modal transportation strategy that includes improved bike programs, carshare programs, carpooling/vanpooling strategies, and often, increased parking rates.
- **Marketing** : For U-Pass programs to be successful, they must be successfully marketed. Marketing should capitalize on the environmental benefits associated with the program and should include information about how to use transit and/or other transportation programs.



Application to Mid-South

University of Memphis

University of Memphis is one of the flagship institutions in the University of Tennessee system. There are over 23,000 students and 5,500 faculty and staff on campus during the academic calendar. The campus also has a large commuting population with nearly 86% of the student body living off-campus. The University of Memphis currently charges for parking; and charges range depending on location and lot type. The University also sponsors a shuttle, The Blue Line to support on-campus circulation.

The University of Memphis is located near the intersection of Highland and Southern Avenues, about one block from Poplar Avenue, one of the strongest transit corridors in the region. Direct service to the U of M is available on the Route 5 Central from downtown and the Route 9 Highland which travels along Highland Street. Routes 5 and 9 have relatively low levels of service. Negotiating service increases is often part of a U-Pass program.

Other potential U-Pass partners:

Southwest Tennessee Community College | University of Tennessee Medical Campus | Christian Brothers University | Rhodes College

The University of Memphis operates an on-campus shuttle to move people around campus and between major destinations. This new service operates from 7:00 AM to 11:00 PM.



A U-Pass program could compliment this program by providing access from off-campus areas to campus, allowing students, faculty, and staff to get where they need to go without traveling by car.

See also **federal employer subsidy** for complementary strategy.

Best Practice

The **University of Washington (UW)**, like the University of Memphis is an urban campus located just outside of downtown Seattle. The UW U-Pass is one of the first and most successful examples in the U.S. The program began in the early 1990s and offers students, faculty and staff unlimited, free-fare access to most public transportation services in the Puget Sound region. When the program was initially implemented, the largest regional operator, Seattle King County Metro (KCM) added transit service to the main UW campus in Seattle. UW also increased parking fees substantially and offered a series of other transportation demand management programs, such as vanpool fare credits, discounted carpool parking, guaranteed ride home, etc. Students, faculty and staff accessed bus service using their university ID card. Revenues to support the program were raised through a transportation fee charged to students, faculty, and staff, with a contribution from parking fees. The UW UPass program resulted in a significant increase in demand for transit services and over time as ridership has increased, so has transit service to the campus.

Students are required to participate in the UPass program and pay a \$76 fee per quarter. Participation is optional for faculty and staff, who pay \$136/quarter for the program. Studies of UW's UPass program demonstrate that since the program began, drive alone commuting has decreased by some 38%¹. The program also generates approximately \$7.5 million annually for King County Metro (who is among several transit providers participating in the program).



1 Letter from UW President Michael Young to King County Council, 2011