

Prices go up at Texas A&M

Other shuttle buses cheaper

by JERRY MAZE

Battalion Staff
Increasing fuel, parts and labor costs have led to Texas A&M University's shuttle bus riders paying more for shuttle bus passes for the 1980-81 school year. But two other schools have found a way to decrease the cost of the service per student.

For the upcoming school year, shuttle bus riders will be faced with a 26 percent price increase for student passes, from \$30 to \$38. The price of student-spouse passes will rise from \$45 to \$55, a 22 percent increase, and faculty-staff passes increase 25 percent, from \$40 to \$50.

Texas A&M contracts the shuttle bus service from Transportation Enterprises Incorporated (TEI), the same company that provides shuttle service for the University of Texas at Austin and Southwest Texas State University in San Marcos.

Brady Burnett, branch manager of TEI, said Texas A&M uses 28 buses per day in its system, each bus averaging just over nine hours of service, or 254 hours total per day.

For the present school year, Burnett said, about 7,500 people are riding the buses.

The service currently costs Texas A&M \$14.30 an hour per bus, Burnett said. But the cost to Texas A&M will increase by 18.8 percent, to \$17 per hour in the fall, plus \$1.30 per hour fuel adjustment.

He said TEI must increase its charge to offset the current 18 percent inflation rate and the price of fuel, which has doubled in the past year.

He said TEI has also raised its base pay rate by 12 percent since August to insure getting quality drivers that can be responsible for getting students to class on time.

He said the pay rate will probably increase to 21 percent in the next year because having good drivers and maintenance personnel is essential to the success of the service and the longevity of the buses.

Burnett said shuttle buses remain the most economical means of transportation available to students, even with the rate increase.

It costs riders 47.5 cents per day to use the buses, Burnett said, no matter how many times they ride.

He said the buses allow students to come to campus an indefinite number of times each day for half the price of a gallon of gasoline, and they do not have to find a place to park.

Burnett said these rates will allow TEI to provide a regular, dependable service for Texas A&M — until operational costs go up again.

"Although I wish the price didn't have to go up to the students," he said, "it is going to, and I think they'll be able to afford it."

"It might defer ridership some, but I hope it does not."

One alternative to paying higher prices for shuttle service is being used at the University of Texas, where students pay for the service as part of their registration fee.

Students are charged a \$1.98 shuttle bus fee for every semester hour they take. All students pay the fee and the maximum charge to anyone is \$23.50, or the equivalent of taking 12 hours.

Doyle Stone, vice president for operations at TEI in Austin, said, "Because of the number of people and the congestion we have, everybody benefits whether they ride or not."

"There is occasionally something said about everyone having to pay, but there are no violent objections."

Stone said the University of Texas system operates 55 buses each day with 500 total service hours.

The system, Stone said, is simple because students do not need a pass, only their I.D. card to prove they are students.

At Southwest Texas State University, students pay \$7 each for the shuttle service and do not have to display a pass of any kind to the drivers.

Joan Baron, assistant director of auxiliary services at SWTSU, said everyone being able to ride the buses has not created problems because the buses run only to areas heavily populated by students and return directly to campus, making them inconvenient for any non-students.

The SWTSU system consists of 10 buses at a school of 17,000 students.

Baron said the only complaints come from students who do not use the service and feel they are paying for other people's service.

At both schools, faculty or anyone else may ride the buses by paying \$7 at SWTSU and the ceiling price of \$23.50 at Texas.

Burnett said such systems are not seen in the near future at Texas A&M because of University administrators' reluctance.

Having worked for three years in the Austin system, Burnett said the system encourages students to use the buses because they are paying for them anyway and the result is less demand for parking spaces on campus.

He said the routes in College Station could be easily modified to facili-

tate nearly all on-campus student traveling within the city, giving them more use of the service.

By adding a stop at Culppepper Plaza, he said, students could be given access to stores and entertainment. The cost, Burnett said, under such a system would be \$10 per student.

Eugene Oates, chairman of the shuttle bus operations committee, said, "The shuttle bus committee reviewed the possibility of having a system like the ones at Austin and San Marcos, but they decided it was not just to make students pay for a service they would not use."

He said the shuttle bus service at

Texas A&M is subsidized 20 percent out of student service fees, and if this support is ever lost a new plan might have to be sought.

Oates said the policies and schedules, with the exception of the new prices, of the shuttle bus system will remain as they are now for the fall semester.

Spring brings snakes out

The warm spring weather that is bringing Texans out of their homes into the countryside is also bringing snakes out of their winter dens.

When man and snake come together, it usually means trouble, said a Texas A&M University wildlife specialist.

Each year more than 2,400 people are bitten by snakes, both poisonous and nonpoisonous, explained Charles Ramsey, but fortunately, the incidence of poisonous snakebites is rare.

The death rate from snakebites is even lower — less than 1 percent of the snakebite victims — and most people will recover quickly without side effects, Ramsey said.

If bitten by any type of snake, try not to panic, advises Ramsey. Bites of harmless snakes do not pro-

duce immediate swelling, discoloration, intense burning or any of the other symptoms normally associated with poisonous snakebites, he said.

Indeed, probably the best advice is to learn to identify the poisonous snakes and leave them alone, said the Texas A&M specialist.

"Snakes are rarely aggressive toward humans," he said. "If you encounter a snake, just walk away and leave it alone," he said.

"If necessary, an average person can outrun an aggressive snake," he added.

Poisonous snakes in Texas considered to be dangerous to humans include species from two families: pit vipers such as rattlesnakes, copperheads and cottonmouths, and cobra-like snakes including the coral snake.

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