

OPINION

THE BATTALION

Page 11 • Monday, September 29, 2003

TS must re-evaluate bus routes

Every day, more than 30,000 students ride buses to commute to or get around campus. Transit Services, formerly known as Bus Ops, has been adding bus routes since 1999 to improve mobility for students and accommodate those inconvenienced by the construction of the West Campus Garage. Implementation of these services has strained the Transit Services' budget to the point that it now faces a \$324,000 shortfall for the fiscal year. Transit Services assessed that the additional services added during West Campus Garage construction have increased service costs beyond the amount generated by the \$50 per student transit fee.



DAVID SHOEMAKER

Although at this point some type of service rationalization is necessary in the face of increasing passengers, TS, students and the University need to create a plan to deal with the service and capital funding problems faced by Transit Services. TS needs to adjust the services on routes with a low number of riders and high cost routes to bring it more in line with the budget goal. It also needs to reduce usage or retire as many older buses as possible, and create a plan with the University and students to replace buses to avoid such problems.

Transit Services' solution has been to outline potential routes and services to be reduced to make up for the shortfall. Even with those efforts, high maintenance costs on the older Thomas buses used by TS are still not addressed.

TS has already made plans for service changes to reduce the deficit for this year. The goals primarily focus on off-campus routes, such as the route used by students of the Rural Public Health Medical School, or the route used for weekend off-campus service. According to TS figures, the RPH route costs almost \$50 per passenger, which is simply unacceptable.

Many of the weekend routes also had high costs compared to other routes, and five of the routes had fewer than 10 passengers an hour.

TS has decided that weekend service should be replaced by a Dial-A-Ride service, where vans would pick up students on weekends rather than run empty buses on fixed routes. Vans should be used on other low ridership routes, especially in non-

peak periods.

The expanded use of vans on low-density services, where possible, might also help cut TS' rising bus fuel and maintenance costs. According to TS, roughly \$11,000 is spent each year maintaining the old Thomas buses, compared to \$7,000 for the newer Nova buses.

Although the older buses cannot be retired yet, one way to minimize costs for them is to reduce the hours they operate as much as possible. According to TS, this reduction would help cover all fuel costs as well, which comprises 9 percent of the 2004 budget. However, service changes and reductions in bus hours, which are expected to total \$180,000 this year, up from \$83,000 in fiscal 1998, are not enough.

TS needs to create a plan with students and the University allowing them to plan for long-range bus acquisitions and maintenance of service levels.

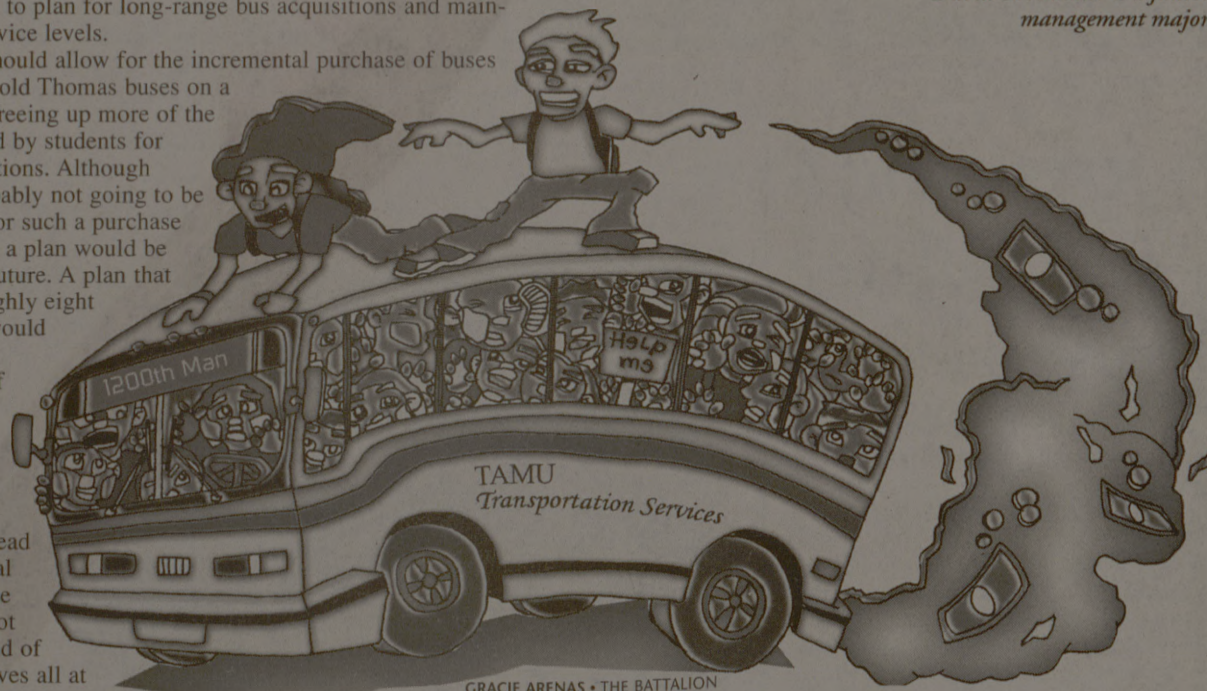
The plan should allow for the incremental purchase of buses to replace the old Thomas buses on a yearly basis, freeing up more of the transit fee paid by students for funding operations. Although funds are probably not going to be forthcoming for such a purchase this year, such a plan would be useful in the future. A plan that purchases roughly eight buses a year would allow for full replacement of the older buses in four years.

The advantage of a purchase plan spread out over several years is that the buses would not come to the end of their service lives all at

once, which is a major problem currently facing TS. Thus, the problem of having 49 steadily deteriorating buses needing replacement en masse could be avoided in the future.

Transit Services faces a serious budget shortfall this year, which is indicative of major problems inherent in its funding and where the money is going. TS should not have to fully shoulder the load of providing increased services and new bus purchases on the same fixed fee. Students, university administrators and TS itself need to come to a comprehensive solution to this problem.

David Shoemaker is a junior management major.



GRACIE ARENAS • THE BATTALION

College costs should be discussed during divorce

In a recent legal uprising spreading across America, parents are being ordered by courts to pay their children's tuition bills. This is not because their children have any sort of extenuating circumstances or because the parents had previously agreed to pay. The reason is solely because the parents are divorced.



SARA FOLEY

Seventeen states permit such rulings in which divorced parents are forced to pay their children's college costs. Recently, the New Hampshire House of Representatives became the first to prohibit such rulings, and the case is expected to go before the state Senate next year.

In a generation where students are frequently the children of divorced parents, the problem of college tuition payments will undoubtedly be questioned. However, the question should be answered during divorce settlements and not when the tuition bills come in.

The major inconsistency with these rulings is that no parents are legally required to pay their child's tuition. Unless all parents are required to pay their child's tuition bills, regardless of their marital status, divorced parents should not be the exception.

As many students can attest, parents are not always the ones paying the bills. Students often bear the burden with student loans or while they attend school. Even many parents who are financially able to pay tuition bills require their children to pay their own bills to build responsibility. A married couple does not necessarily pay its child's tuition bills, as these rulings assume. Because of this, a divorced parent should not be required to pay either.

The rulings are based on what would have happened had the parents remained together, a

fact that cannot be proven and should not have anything based upon it.

These rulings that force divorced parents, even those without partial custody, to pay for college tuition are unfair to the parent; the parent may not have a close relationship with his child but still be required to pay thousands of dollars in tuition payments.

"As many students can attest, parents are not always the ones paying the bills. Students often bear the burden with student loans or holding jobs during school."

The divorced parent in question could have little influence in the child's life, including his choice of school, as was the problem of Alexander Duran. According to cnn.com, Duran was

ordered to help pay tuition bills for his daughter, who chose Brown University over a less expensive school that had given her a better financial aid offer. Duran claimed that he had no input on her decision, and that his ex-wife swayed their

daughter's decision.

Children of divorced parents are statistically less likely to go to college, according to The New York Times. This fact should not grant them special treatment. While this may be true, contributing factors such as the economic status and ethnic backgrounds of divorced families also increase the likelihood of those children going to college.

Students faced with tuition payments have plenty of options, such as military contracts, loans, scholarships, grants or choosing to attend a less expensive school. Having a divorced parent should not be a guaranteed payment, and assuming that it ignores the reality of the many students who put themselves through school.

Child support ends at 18, and at that age students should be mature enough to take responsibility for their own education.

Sara Foley is a junior journalism major.

MAIL CALL

Leaving the game is against tradition

What does the tradition of the Twelfth Man mean to our school? Is it something just symbolic we like to tell our friends about to make ourselves look good, or is it something special to A&M that we actually practice?

On Saturday, we had to watch our Aggies be outscored by Pittsburgh. Shockingly, before the fourth quarter even began, students began leaving Kyle Field. That was nothing compared to the mass exodus of students filing out with four minutes left in the game. Once the game was over, another large chunk left as the yell practice began. Then, to make matters worse, the team, which had lined up facing the student body, had to witness the ghastly sight.

Honestly, how hard is it to go to the game, stand up, and stay until the clock reads zero? Not only do the players deserve this spirit, but if we're going to call ourselves the best fans in the nation, we better show it and stop fooling ourselves. Anyone can call themselves great fans when the team wins, but the Twelfth Man should stand out regardless of the outcome.

To the members of the Twelfth Man who stood and yelled the entire game: thank you, and it was a privilege being there amongst you.

To the football team: we will show you a better Kyle Field against Baylor, but for now, let's beat the hell outta Texas Tech!

Cuyler Dear
Class of 2006

Students must stay until the bitter end

I was saddened to read Sunday in The Bryan College Station Eagle that Kyle Field started emptying with seven minutes left in the game against Pittsburgh. During the Virginia Tech game, I had to explain to my mom that, although the Aggies were certainly going to lose, we couldn't turn off the television because Aggies stay for the whole game, win or lose.

Texas A&M is a special place to get a college education, because not only do you learn about your chosen field, hopefully you'll learn about how to relate well with people. Be assured, the football team surely noticed that Kyle was quiet and empty. Some players may have not cared, but some probably felt like they were lied to when they were told that Aggies stand with them win or lose.

Yes, it's just football. But look at the bigger picture. When we learn to be diligent in the little things we've been given, we will be diligent over the greater things to come.

Philo H. DuVal Jr. 1951 said, "I've

seen them play since way back when, and they've always had the grit; I've seen 'em lose and I've seen 'em win, but I've never seen 'em quit."

They haven't quit yet, so don't quit on them.

Cariño Casas
Class of 1999

An early exit is unacceptable

I cannot believe that Aggie fans left the Pittsburgh game early because we were being outscored. My husband and I live in Iceland and would give anything to be back at Kyle Field. My husband spends time every evening and weekend reading as many articles as he can about the Aggies. We miss going to the games so badly that we set our alarm and wake up at midnight just so we could listen to the Internet broadcast of the game. Of course we wish we could have beaten the hell outta Virginia Tech and Pittsburgh but we were thrilled to feel like we were still part of the Twelfth Man by listening to the games.

The fact that our record stands at 2-2 should only inspire Aggies to support their team even more. My husband and I plan on waking up at 2 a.m. this Sunday morning so we can watch the Aggies beat the hell outta Texas Tech, if we are fortunate enough to receive this game on tel-

evision. We love Texas A&M and we love what Texas A&M stands for.

Lynda Ruffino
Class of 1992

An Aggie should never boo

I was extremely disappointed today at the behavior my fellow Aggies displayed at the game on Saturday. It seems some people do not recognize the true spirit of being an Aggie. In all of the games I have attended there has never been booing in the stands. Aggies do not boo; they hiss. I am not sure who it was, but it bothers me to know that

this behavior exists among my fellow Aggies. I don't care what kind of call the referees made, Aggies do not boo!

Robert Klepac
Class of 2003

