

Transportation

Introduction

Regardless of their degree program, field, or funding status, every graduate and professional student must use some form of transportation to get to and from campus at some point during their time at Cornell. Further, many, if not all, graduate and professional students will also use some sort of transportation for trips away from Ithaca, whether for professional reasons, such as travel to conferences, or personal ones, such as trips to visit family or vacation over break. Along with its ubiquity, there are unique elements to graduate student transportation that are distinct from those of other groups at Cornell. First, graduate and professional students may be traveling similar distances to campus as faculty and staff, but on a much more constrained budget. Therefore, on average, graduate students spend more time commuting than do undergraduates. Second, many graduate and professional students have demanding program requirements that require them to be present on campus for long hours; some lab activities, or other in-person program activities, such as on-call hours for veterinary students, may even require very late night or very early morning transportation. At such times, public transportation is not necessarily convenient, if it is even available at all.

The transportation section of the 2013 iteration of the GPCI had two objective areas: parking and public transportation. For parking, it called for more “reasonable, fair, and equitable” parking options, such as reduced parking rates for graduate students who live on campus and pay for a residential parking permit there, and for professional students in the College of Veterinary Medicine. Another series of action items focused on better awareness and communication about transportation options for students with temporary mobility issues. The public transportation objective included some action items which have been achieved, such as the development of a better TCAT trip planner⁶ and the development of a mobile transit app in conjunction with Cornell students⁷. Other areas of focus in 2013 included early morning OmniRide hours for graduate and professional students, and route development, including park-and-ride, targeted at the graduate and professional student population.

There are numerous transportation options available to graduate and professional students, regardless of whether they live on- or off-campus. In addition to public transportation, students can drive their own personal vehicle, bike, or walk. Carpools, facilitated by Cornell-sanctioned services like ZimRide, are also an option. The biggest change in the suite of transportation options since the last GPCI was conducted in 2013, however, would be the June 2017 authorization of “transportation network companies” (application-based ride share companies) in New York State. The growth of Uber, Lyft, and other such companies has changed the transportation-based landscape of Ithaca, providing a reliable backup method of getting to campus, and, for some students, becoming a part of their daily commute.

⁶ This was achieved through the integration of TCAT routes and timetables with the Google Map interface in December 2017 (see <https://www.ithacajournal.com/story/news/local/2017/12/19/tcat-route-schedule-info-now-available-google-maps/965692001/>).

⁷ <https://cornellsun.com/2018/05/01/student-project-team-releases-new-tcat-app-to-simplify-navigation-process/>

Of course, there are likely to be as many transportation strategies as there are graduate and professional students on campus. However, some trends and commonalities emerge when looking at aggregate data, provided by Cornell Transportation and Mail Services. The goal of this document is outline three areas where continued emphasis is needed. First, given the prevalence of public transportation in graduate students' transportation plans, the first objective targets continued provision of high-quality public transportation services, with future emphasis on exploring potential routes to better serve areas where graduate students live and work. The next objective focuses on parking: although fewer graduate students avail themselves of this option, it is still an important area of focus, especially for students in professional programs like those in the College of Veterinary Medicine. In addition, one specific actionable objective proposes one important means of connecting these two transportation methods. Finally, the third objective addresses transportation and travel out of Ithaca. Although this is an area where the University has less purview, and was not addressed in the previous GPCI, it is still an important, and often frustrating, component of graduate students' transportation systems.

Objectives

Objective 1: Provide graduate and professional students with functional and comprehensive public transportation options

Rationale: Public transportation is the single most widely utilized transportation method for graduate and professional students traveling to and from campus. Given the predominance of Cornell ridership for TCAT, it is clearly important for all campus communities, but especially for graduate and professional students, who tend to have longer commutes and constrained budgets. It is also important that gains made in the integration of TCAT services with technology be recognized and continue to develop as technologies advance.

Actions:

- a. Encourage the Cornell representatives on the TCAT Board of Directors to survey the needs of graduate and professional students as distinct from those of undergraduates, and to hold a yearly focus group with each community for their views on their changing public transportation needs.
- b. Given the popularity of Route 10, the Cornell-Commons shuttle, TCAT and Cornell Transportation Services should consider the development of other shuttle style routes: these routes could be designed to connect different residential neighborhoods than those serviced by Route 10 with central campus, the South Meadow Street shopping area with central campus, or downtown with other parts of campus, such as the Ag Quad and biological sciences areas. Introducing weekend service for Route 10 should also be considered.
- c. Together with TCAT, Cornell Transportation Services should explore the possibility of creating campus "circulator" routes, which would move students from one part of campus to another without the wait times associated with the buses to and from downtown.

- d. Work with TCAT to continue to identify areas of the community that are underserved, and times (especially at night) where demand for buses is not being met. Faculty and advisors should be encouraged to consider the timing of the last buses when scheduling exams, research, or other academic activities at night.
- e. Explore the feasibility of reducing or eliminating the OmniRide rate for graduate and professional students, including through allocation of funds from the Student Activity Fee.
- f. Explore the feasibility of expanding the hours in which OmniRide access is free for graduate and professional students, including early morning access.
- g. Pursue a policy that would give graduate students who park in the B Lot free access to TCAT Route 82, which connects the B Lot with the rest of campus.
- h. The Graduate School and GPSA should ensure that rideshare options, like Cornell ZimRide, are well publicized. Greater attention should be given to the possibility of carpooling as a viable option for the daily commute to work, as well as for longer trips (see Objective 3).
- i. Continue to explore and develop ways to make campus and Collegetown more friendly to cyclists, including potential integration with the Lime bike system that is available downtown and development of longer bike paths connecting campus with nearby towns.

Objective 2: Provide parking options that balance the goals of accessibility, sustainability, and reduced congestion

Rationale: Parking is a transportation option that is most likely to be utilized by students who are the most time constrained, either due to demanding lab or program requirements, or to family or other off-campus needs. These community members' parking needs should continue to be supported, or even expanded, as the need arises. However, the needs of convenience and accessibility also must be balanced with the negative externalities arising from personal car use, including pollution and on-campus congestion. Continuing to acknowledge that such a tension exists and continuing to dialogue about what the campus community would like to prioritize are important parts of achieving this objective.

Actions:

- a. Residential parking rates at Maplewood, Hasbrouck, and Thurston Court should be subsidized whenever possible, especially for students with families who are already more budget constrained and more likely to rely on a car for transportation.
- b. Given the expanding enrollment in the College of Veterinary Medicine and the demanding on-call hours required by the program, more parking passes should be made available to these students in their preferred lots.
- c. Graduate and professional students, especially those in representative bodies like the GPSA, should actively engage in debate about the presence of cars on campus, and weigh the costs and benefits of potential policies that would limit or exclude cars from campus, or parts of campus, during peak hours.

- d. Advocate for a system that allocates parking passes to students whose research or teaching requires frequent travel to campus at “off-peak” hours, which may require graduate or professional students being allowed to purchase parking passes before undergraduate students.
- e. Parking signage should be standardized and made as explicit as possible, so that it is clear when the lots are free.
- f. As it becomes more widespread, Cornell should consider investing in technology that enables drivers to see real time where spots are available. This will reduce time and fuel wasted when drivers circle congested parts of campus looking for parking.

Objective 3: Continue to advocate for economical and flexible transportation options for travel out of Ithaca, whether by bus or by air

Rationale: Travel away from Ithaca is a fundamental part of most graduate and professional students’ career and personal development. The time and cost associated with travel can potentially deter Cornell students from attending conferences or job interviews, especially when compared with students at peer institutions. A robust transportation sector is also important for combatting isolation and ensuring graduate students can remain connected with their families, friends, and colleagues in other places. These factors are all likely to be highly weighted when graduate and professional students are choosing whether or not to attend Cornell.

Actions:

- a. Cornell should continue to advocate with the Ithaca Airport on behalf of its students and encourage development of new routes and the possibility of contracting with low-cost carriers for service. The ITH-IAD flight is a positive step in this direction and this sort of momentum should be continued.
- b. Transportation options, such as bus service, that would help students flying out of cheaper airports in the area (such as Syracuse or even Rochester) should be explored by campus transportation leaders.
- c. Right now, there is no direct transportation connection between Cornell and the airports in New York City, which can pose a significant time barrier for travel, especially travel abroad. Cornell should work with Ithaca city leaders to attract companies willing to address this gap.