YSU
Alternative Transportation Advisory Committee
Q1 2010 Report

Charge to the Committee

Working with programs at YSU and throughout the broader Mahoning Valley, the Alternative Transportation Advisory Committee will assess, recommend and evaluate alternative transportation options for the YSU community that enables the University to effectively and responsively meet both changes to our transportation environment and/or to address the evolving issues of sustainability and the improvement of our environment.

Two critical objectives

The University is faced with two inter-related objectives. The work of the committee has tried to be responsive to both. The first objective is operational and very pragmatic. The University must be able to effectively respond when faced with significant transportation challenges and those responses should have been developed and vetted in advance of need. YSU does this in many ways right now. We have emergency response plans for weather, for violence on campus, for infectious diseases, for campus infrastructure failures, for computer and network security breaches and on and on. In a similar way we need to be prepared to help the campus community with effective transportation options when challenges arise.

This committee was constituted when the cost of fuel was over $4.00 per gallon. At that time we had no prepared response. The price of fuel has since fallen to under $3.00. This reduction is not cause to dismiss the problem of high prices for fuel but rather a respite during which the university can better prepare for the challenge of fuel pricing. In a similar vein, YSU faces a challenge with parking and this committee has considered responses to that challenge. We may face other challenges such as government policies and student demographic shifts or even opportunities such as funding and partnerships that will be easier to address with appropriate planning already underway. To the degree that we consider options ahead of demand, the more resilient YSU will be.

The second objective addresses the set of challenges that YSU faces as it considers what it will be relative to its role as an urban research university. These are classic academic issues of teaching, learning, research and service, all be it with a twist. The twist in this case is that YSU, in partnership with its adjoining communities, must not only address the challenges of tomorrow’s urban living but must demonstrate a willingness to lead by example.

YSU is extremely well positioned to address issues of land use and transportation. It exists within a city that can easily serve, and has indicated a willingness to serve, as a laboratory for research and testing. We know from observation that the existence of vibrant choices in modes of transportation is a strong indicator of urban success. The
development of transportation choice provides the opportunity for rich research, both technical and social. Students with a strong grounding in the research of urban land use and alternative transportation will not only be competitive for post-graduate opportunities but are also more likely to keep their skills and knowledge in the same urban environment that they have helped to create. More importantly, the vast majority of governmental funding for both research and for urban renewal is for projects that are collaborations between institutions of higher education and their external communities.

Most of the work of the committee has been focused on contingency planning where the committee can be more effective in the consideration of alternatives. It should be noted that in our efforts to plan for alternative transportation, YSU is neither ahead of, nor behind, the curve for AASCU institutions or urban/metropolitan institutions. Most are largely commuter institutions and are still struggling with this issue. No other NEO University has an Alternative Transportation Committee or Program. Lead institutions, such as Portland State University, are typically those whose broader communities address land use and transportation progressively.

From the perspective of building and maintaining economically and socially viable communities here in NE Ohio, addressing sustainability and helping our communities rethink transportation may among YSU’s most strategic challenges. The Committee looks forward to addressing alternative transportation opportunities that can positively influence YSU’s success as an urban research university.

What follows are the Committee’s perspectives and recommended action items on specific issues of alternative transportation. Some are tactical and directed to our need to respond to challenges, others are more strategic and either address longer term flexibility or our engagement as an urban research university.

**Parking at YSU**

Over the past six months, triggered by the need to remove or repair the M2 (Lincoln Avenue) parking deck, the committee has become interested in the issue of parking on the YSU campus for several reasons. The first is obvious. The demand for parking is linked to the mode of transportation chosen by students, faculty and staff. The committee examined funding and the costs of providing parking relative to alternative ways to assess and distribute fees, enabling more services than simply parking. It seems clear to the committee that a significant capital investment in parking facilities by YSU alone ties up space and funding and runs counter to both sustainability and resilience philosophies.

It must be noted that parking, both how much and where, will continue to be one of the strategic transportation issues at YSU for the foreseeable future. Both Cleveland State University and the University of Akron are currently rethinking their levels of surface and structured parking to attempt to reach an appropriate balance against shifting demand. It is clear that existing, viable investments in parking should be well maintained
to keep those investments viable into the future. At the same time, marginal facilities should be considered for strategic transformation.

The recommendations of the committee recognize the importance of parking at YSU but also recognize that parking must be accommodated in a manner that sees it as one of many aspects of total transportation and one that must be as flexible as possible as we move forward into more uncertain times. YSU has been and continues to be an urban University. As such, it must act in a manner that reflects parking and other forms of transportation in a progressive and sustainable urban manner rather than one reflected in a more rural or suburban mindset.

**Demand for Parking:** Alternative Transportation can relieve the demand for parking on campus. Better uses of multiple riders per car, shuttle services, public transportation, walking and biking all reduce the need for the University to utilize limited capital dollars for parking facilities. Ample parking promotes one person / one car modes of transportation while limited parking forces individuals to seek alternatives. The over-provision of parking is evident from a drive down any commercial strip in America (for example, RT 224 from Poland to Canfield). Green spaces are paved over yielding land and air and storm-water problems. YSU should not plan for parking based only on demand. Such demand is not related to any personal, market-based decisions but rather on a historical, perceived entitlement to park quickly and close. Peer institutions are now consistently taking a more strategic view of parking and are working to change cultural norms.

**Community-based solutions:** The committee believes that the use of capital funds for long-term projects solely related to parking is strategically unsound. Parking is not, and should not be, a core part of YSU’s mission. Parking is a broader community issue. Solutions should be sought that right-size parking at YSU and its immediate, surrounding areas and maximize any use of funding by seeking partners in the community. Several plans for joint ventures have already been discussed and several involve the use of Federal stimulus funds. In addition an “earmark” proposal directed to Representative Ryan has already been prepared by the University, the City of Youngstown and the Mahoning Valley CIC to develop a multi-modal transportation facility between Wood and Commerce Streets. The vast majority of parking at YSU should be strategically relegated to the fringes of the campus where the campus abuts the broader community. Locations should be chosen to stimulate joint YSU-City/County/hospital/etc. development.

**Fees:** The committee realizes that to do some of the alternative transportation projects that YSU should be doing requires a conversion from optional parking fees to a mandatory transportation fee. A mandatory fee will allow YSU to borrow against known revenue streams and will allow YSU to better supply services in support of alternative transportation and beyond simple parking. The committee believes that this fee should be applied to both students and employees and should be structured so that it is exclusively used for parking AND transportation. Since parking is a contractual issue for most YSU employees, contracts would have to be altered during normal negotiation cycles. At the
start, and with respect to employees, funds that are currently moved from Fringe Benefits pools to “Parking” could be, instead, moved to “Transportation”.

**Basic Transportation fees:** Little discussion has been had thus far on the scope of new Transportation fees. However it does seem evident that YSU is dramatically under-pricing existing parking fees relative to both peer institutions and to existing costs. YSU’s parking fee is $78 for students and $85 for employees per semester. As a comparison, CSU charges $160 for students and $243 for employees while Akron charges $115 for students and $110 for employees and is proposing an increase to $150 for students. In addition it has become clear that YSU’s “parking” reserves are insufficient to address the need to properly maintain and/or renew our parking facilities. At current rates, it will be difficult to address basic parking properly let alone address other transportation issues.

**Optional fees for parking/transportation services:** In addition to the assessment of a basic transportation fee, the committee supports the concept of additional, optional fees. In the realm of parking this would be related to premium parking services. When parking is included in a transportation fee it should be for remote parking and associated campus shuttle services as is done in many other Universities. Optional close-in parking should be limited in numbers and assessed an additional fee to be paid by the individual. Many schools have three tiers of parking. Tier one is basic parking at remote sites, Tier two is a hunt license at closer lots. Tier three is a designated, guaranteed spot, 24 X 7. The most important factor in optional fee parking is that it applies market-based decisions to parking and moves us from “entitlement” parking.

Optional fees might also be associated with WRTA pass purchases, premium bicycle / motorcycle parking, bicycle rental, van-pooling, access to alternative-energy “day” cars, and other specialized or personalized services.

**Parking enforcement:** Any revision to parking must incorporate rigorous enforcement of both City and Campus parking regulations. Street parking should be minimized to the extent that it does allow for parking that services commercial sites in the neighborhood but does not bring undue traffic and dangerous parking to the primarily pedestrian streets on, or adjacent to, campus. Enforcement of parking rules would also be necessary to maintain tiered parking commitments. On-street parking should be relatively expensive and of short duration so as to encourage off-street, lot parking.

**Campus Shuttle Services**

If YSU is to adopt a tiered parking system that utilizes a mix of close-in, remote and community-partnered parking then it must have a robust and user-friendly campus shuttle. Such shuttles will assist commuters in movement to and from parking lots but will also support movement around the campus, as well as to and from residence halls and selected rental properties. Shuttle routes should be scheduled based on usage patterns and should utilize digital technologies to enable pocket communication devices such as cellular phones to know where a shuttle is and when it may arrive at a given stop. The key to effective shuttles is ample start-up funding to initially over compensate on
scheduling to build satisfaction among riders and increase utilization. Campus shuttles should also provide a direct connection to and from WRTA transfer points.

**Walking**

Walking is a viable option for many. Compared to many Ohio public University campuses, YSU is relatively compact. Walking as a means of alternative transportation should be encouraged, especially as housing adjacent to the campus continues to expand. However, walking is much more likely to be undertaken if several other issues are addressed first. The existence of a robust shuttle service would encourage walking because walkers would believe that if they had to alter their walking plans due to weather, time or another unforeseen issue, they could quickly switch to a shuttle. Walkways need to be improved and care given to maintenance, especially in the winter. Street crossings need to be greatly improved with pedestrian designated crossings installed on most major and minor streets. We know that when walkways are improved and maintained, as was the case with the Elm Street enhancement, they are used.

Street crossing upgrades will have to be done in conjunction with City, State and/or Federal officials. Spine routes such as Lincoln Avenue from Wick to Fifth and Phelps from Lincoln to Wood would have to have as much traffic and parking removed from them as possible and be dedicated to pedestrians and public transit / campus shuttles. Finally, police patrols to ensure safety would have to be substantial especially along spine routes and at off hours. Most importantly we need to give heightened priority to pedestrian traffic within the boundaries of the YSU campus.

**Motorcycles:**

Motorcycles in Ohio are primarily three season vehicles but when they can be used they are, relative to automobiles, fuel efficient and parking efficient.

In all legal respects, motorcycles and motor scooters are motor vehicles. As such, they must follow all rules of the road and should have valid YSU parking permits. A cursory investigation reveals that few operators of motorcycles register for YSU parking. Therefore, one of the first goals for the campus would be to enforce parking regulations relative to motorcycles. If a “Transportation Fee” were enacted then there would not be a cost for parking permit and thus getting individuals to comply should be easier. A second goal for enhancing motorcycle use is the construction, maintenance and promotion of motorcycle parking areas, preferably close to the center to campus to further encourage the use of efficient vehicles, in places that are visible so as to deter theft, and covered to protect the cycles from the elements. Registration of Motorcycles would give the YSU parking staff better information on how much parking should be made available. Finally, as in other efforts, motorcycle policies, especially parking, would have to be enforced.

**Bicycles:**
Promoting the increased use of bicycles for transportation is attractive for many reasons but also difficult for many other reasons. On the positive side, bicycles are the best form of transportation between walking distance and 5-10 miles. They are not only efficient but, like walking, also have the benefit of providing the rider with some beneficial cardiovascular activity. Many urban areas are gaining national notoriety for being designated as bicycle-friendly cities. While typically a three season commuting option, bicyclists in bicycle-intensive cities like Amsterdam, Portland Oregon and even Montreal have been known to be more willing than most to soldier-on and brave elements. The City of Youngstown and the Eastgate Regional Council of Governments have master plans for creating designated and restricted bicycle spine trails/routes across town and for connecting those routes to the YSU campus. Significant bicycle trails already exist in NE Ohio and Western PA.

However, there remains a large gap between the promise of bicycles and the reality of today. It will be some time before the City of Youngstown has dedicated bicycle routes in place. Moreover, those routes will still require most riders to use streets both to get from their homes to the dedicated cycle routes and because some routes will utilize public streets. Street riding requires confidence and experience. Gaining that experience is a steep entry barrier for most individuals. However, many communities have been able to significantly increase bicycle rider-ship despite these same barriers by education, promotion, improved trail signage, lane markings & maintenance, increased policing for safety, and the availability of quality services such as parking.

**Bicycle policy:** While bicycles fall under the State’s Uniform Vehicle Code they are not full-fledged motor vehicles. While there are assumptions that they will be ridden on roads and or designated trails they are capable of being ridden on sidewalks and other smooth surfaces. Thus, on the YSU campus, a policy had to be developed about the use of bicycles on campus. That policy is nearing completion.

**Bicycle parking:** Providing plentiful and high quality bicycle parking encourages ridership. In addition, the supply of bicycle parking is one of the criteria for LEED status of buildings. A bicycle parking rack standard is being developed and racks will be installed in several key areas on campus.

**Bicycle commuting routes:** Individuals who do commute to and from YSU via bicycles will be encouraged to post their routes on the Alternative Transportation Advisory Committee website. Such routes will be listed as possible routes with appropriate warnings and no University warranty of safety implied.

**Public Transportation**

The Alternative Transportation Advisory Committee has spent significant time discussing ways of encouraging the use of public transportation. We have met with WRTA representatives several times and we have had the pleasure of having WRTA’s public transportation consultant, Charlie Nelson, work with the committee. Public transportation in metropolitan Youngstown suffers from fairly traditional problems caused by under-
funding. With too little funding routes and schedules are reduced. When schedule reductions occur, ridership and associated revenues fall … and the cycle continues. Recently WRTA support shifted from a Youngstown only property tax to a County-wide sales tax. Increased revenues may enable them to work on increasing rather than decreasing routes and schedules.

**Bus stops:** With respect to YSU rider-ship, WRTA suffers from a significant lack of visibility on the YSU campus. While there are bus stops on both Wick Avenue and Fifth Avenue, those stops are nearly invisible to all but the most experienced riders. There are no bus stop shelters. There is no central place on the YSU campus at which all busses stop. The downtown bus terminal is within walking distance of campus but it does require a walk past two prisons and some unattractive urban landscape. The downtown bus stop is more of a problem than an attraction for YSU ridership. And, while busses inbound to town will, upon request, divert to and stop at YSU, there is no way to get an outbound bus to divert to campus for pick-ups. The committee has asked WRTA to, at a minimum, review its signage for bus stops near the campus and possible construct shelters at prominent locations.

**Transportation Center:** Several conversations have taken place between University, City and Federal officials relative to a collaborative construction, supported by Federal funding, of a “Transportation” center somewhere on the South (downtown) edge of the campus. Such a center would serve three purposes. It would provide parking for both the campus and for the downtown. It would act as a safe and efficient pedestrian corridor between the campus and the downtown. Finally, it would be a major, visible stop on campus for all WRTA busses, complete with safe, hospitable and productive waiting areas. The committee highly recommends that such a transportation center be a high priority for the campus as it addresses both collaborative parking as well as improved public transportation.

**Park and Ride:** The committee has provided WRTA with demographic mappings of YSU employee and student residences. Looking at the maps there are several prime targets in Mahoning and Trumbull counties for pilot projects for WRTA to utilize small busses to provide express services to the YSU campus. Park and Ride would initially impact employees whose commute times are more regular and traditional. However, if successful with employees, park and ride could be marketed to students. The committee believes that park-and-ride has good potential for success, especially if ways can be found to effectively market it and to give riders some early subsidy support.

**WRTA digital infrastructure:** One of the signatures of successful urban public transportation systems is the degree to which those systems utilize contemporary digital infrastructure and associated services. Successful systems have GPS equipped busses and mechanisms to transmit to users on portable web or cellular devices the location and/or arrival time of a given bus. Moreover, urban busses are moving to incorporate open wireless on busses to provide riders with increased productivity time. A public school system has reported that providing students with wireless access on school busses has not only increased student productivity but also virtually eliminated behavioral
problems on those busses. Clearly, wireless access is one of the strongest inducements WRTA can implement to bring on new riders … riders who otherwise have driving options. The YSU STEMM College could provide community based research opportunities to assist WRTA in these endeavors.

**Ride Sharing**

One of the most often utilized approaches to alternatives to one person – one car transportation is ride sharing. By observation this is probably the most frequently utilized option at YSU, all be it informally. At the beginning of the term, many more cars are parked in YSU lots than are parked in those lots as the term progresses. Clearly, students are discovering colleagues who live near them and are commuting at similar times. Informal ride sharing does have some positive impact.

**Rideshare via the web:** Options exist to promote and simplify ride sharing. Several software vendors sell web-based ride-share software or web services to organizations or communities. Many Universities who are addressing the issue of alternative transportation have their own contract with a vendor to provide ride-share software to their campus community through the campus portal or other faculty, staff, student log-on mechanism. This campus approach allows universities to build a service that focuses on campus-community solutions. Other Universities join with ride-share opportunities in their broader, town-gown communities.

Contemporary ride-share systems use computers and computer messaging that allow those who want a ride to post their needs, those who can give a ride to post their availability and then the system matches up needs and availability. In addition, some systems allow those who need a ride to visually see who is near them who is willing to ride and then facilitates the communications between those parties so that rides can be negotiated.

**Ride-share is operational:** The committee has investigated ride-share software. At the present time it seems too expensive for YSU. Basic services run approximately $800 per month and the likely demand for services does not currently warrant that level of expenditure, especially since there is no line of funding currently available. However, a web-based Ride-share program is currently available through the Eastgate Regional Council of Governments at [http://www.ohiorideshare.com/](http://www.ohiorideshare.com/). Anyone can create an account on Ohiorideshare and once created, use that account to offer or request a commuting ride-share. It should be noted that this system is open to anyone in the region, not just YSU students and employees.

**Guaranteed Ride Home:** EASTGATE Rideshare also offers a Guaranteed Ride Home Program (GRH) to all members of the Rideshare database. GRH acts as an "assurance policy" by reimbursing commuters having to leave work unexpectedly 80% (or a maximum of $60.00) of the costs associated with finding an alternative way home (taxi, bus, rental car, etc.). Thus, Ride-share participants are not “trapped” by their dependence on their scheduled ride.
Passenger Rail:

There are two current rail initiatives with the potential to positively impact the University through the development of efficient inter-city transportation. The Ohio Rail Commission’s Ohio Hub Plan is focused on the development of high-speed rail connections throughout the state, including a Cleveland – Pittsburgh link. The University has already indicated its support for this plan since high speed rail between the State’s major urban areas has strong and positive economic impact for the state and because the plan can easily be extended to, or connected with, other major urban areas such as Youngstown. This effort is long term and at least ten years out.

Connecting Youngstown with the educational, research, industrial, service sector and entertainment centers of Cleveland and Pittsburgh with efficient rail service has great potential to advance the mission of YSU. It enhances joint, collaborative educational and research programs among colleges and Universities. It provides connections for joint academic and private sector research and associated internships. It enhances job creation and job growth through employee and business start-up mobility. It also enhances access to artistic and entertainment opportunities of the region.

Currently in Ohio, regular speed service is being re-established in the 3C (Cleveland-Columbus and Cincinnati) corridor, with a programmatic environmental impact study (PEIS) set to begin on the Cleveland - Pittsburgh corridor. The Cleveland-Pittsburgh Rail Corridor is an effort to connect Pittsburgh and Cleveland with regular commuter rail service. Pennsylvania has already endorsed the concept, as has the Ohio Rail Commission. There are two possible routes for this corridor, one through Youngstown, the other through Alliance, the final route to be selected during the PEIS. A Youngstown stop directly links the city and University to the major technical, industrial, health care and education sectors of Pittsburgh and Cleveland. This effort is more immediate and could come to fruition within two years. It is essential that YSU (and its student representatives) put pressure on state and federal legislators and agencies throughout the PEIS process in order to move the Youngstown connection forward.

Improving Local Neighborhoods

Strategically, nothing we can do to encourage alternative transportation is as important as strengthening the neighborhoods that surround the YSU campus, encouraging the inward migration of students and families that work at YSU and in downtown Youngstown. In fact, one of YSU’s existing strategic goals is to have 20% of its students living on or close to the YSU campus. More people living close enough where commuting by car is not essential means that there will be more demand for safe and effective walking routes, cycling routes and public transportation. More people will be visible on the streets and sidewalks and more commercial businesses will spring up to serve them … creating a positive upward spiral. While this effort is more “urban planning” than simply “alternative transportation” the two are closely coupled. The cities and campuses that
most effectively utilize alternative transportation are those where there is a relatively vibrant residential community close to campus. In turn, Richard Florida has demonstrated that economic development is closely coupled to relatively dense populations of creative people and, as Jane Jacobs reported long ago, those same creative people are drawn to successful cities, successful because of lively street life. Thus the work that YSU has done, in conjunction with the City, County, State and Federal governments to renew the neighborhoods surrounding YSU must not only be continued, but also accelerated.

Action Items:

Short Term -

• Implement a Transportation Fee collected from students and employees alike. The fee from students should be structured to be a dedicated fee and not part of the General Fee pool. The fee from employees should begin as the current parking fee transfer from “fringe benefits”, be identified as a Transportation Fee and be modified as necessary in applicable labor contracts.

• Accommodate near term demand for parking with temporary and or shared lots, extending as far as the downtown area.

• Enforce parking registration for motorcycles (at no cost once we have a transportation fee).

• Work with Eastgate COG to actively promote Ohiorideshare.com and Guaranteed Ride Home to the campus community.

• Work with WRTA to implement bus stop signage and bus shelters at strategic stops on or near campus.

• Work with WRTA to route as many bus lines as possible through/past campus.

• Work with WRTA to put bicycle racks on busses.

• Work with WRTA to pilot several park and ride programs focusing initially on routes between YSU and YSU employee residential clusters. Provide introductory pricing support to riders from the Transportation Fee.

• Work with WRTA to implement a campus shuttle system.

• Working with City Engineers, develop a plan for making the streets and sidewalks around YSU more pedestrian friendly.

• Work with YSU police and City police to more rigorously enforce parking regulations on and around campus.
• Complete the YSU bicycle Policy

• Install (new YSU Standard) bicycle racks in strategic locations on Campus … Andrew Wellness Center and Maag are ready to pay for new ones now.

• Actively lobby State and Federal legislators and officials to incorporate Youngstown as a regular stop on a Pittsburgh-Cleveland rail corridor.

• Actively communicate alternative transportation options and initiatives to the campus community.

Medium Term -

• Build out major new parking facilities in conjunction with others (City, County and local licensed Parking providers) on the boundaries of the City and the Campus in the form of multi-modal transportation facilities. Take advantage of State and Federal funding for such collaborative facilities. May incorporate WRTA terminal as below.

• Work with WRTA to develop a visible campus terminal for all WRTA Lines.

• Implement optional fees for non-basic, optional transportation services, including tiered parking.

• Work with City and Eastgate planners to advance the development and implementation of local bicycle routes and their incorporation of routes to and from YSU.

• Actively promote the development of residential and commercial properties adjacent to the YSU campus.

• Work with Deans and Department Chairpersons to identify service-learning and research opportunities in alternative transportation and how, in general, alternative transportation fits with YSU’s urban research university designation.