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GUEST COLUMNIST

Student interest in external funding

I have chaired the IU Student Transportation Board for the past three academic years. The STB includes representatives from major student organizations: IU Student Association, Graduate and

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is the chairman of the IU Student Transportation Board.

Professional Student Organization, Residence Halls Association, Interfraternity Council, Panhellenic Association, as well as a faculty and staff representative.

The STB has met regularly for three years to review public transportation services provided through the mandatory student transportation fee (\$113.12 per student, yearly).

Mind you, IU students represent 88 percent of the total public transportation passengers in Bloomington, and they pay more than \$4 million in student transportation fees each year. These dollars are the

single largest source of funding for public transportation in the Bloomington community.

In 2007, then-Dean of Students Dick McKaig asked the STB to perform a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) analysis of public transportation services funded by the student transportation fee.

We found that the most serious weakness was the lack of a diversified funding base for the IU Campus Bus Service. Further, we found that the entire Bloomington community was not receiving much of the federal and state funding for which it was eligible; the result is a lesser Bloomington bus service availability than that of other Big Ten schools, including Purdue, Illinois, Iowa and Michigan.

By combining the ridership statistics of IU Campus Bus Service with Bloomington Transit, we could acquire millions of dollars in additional funding for public

transportation in this community.

Currently, Bloomington does not count IU Campus Bus Service's more than 3 million passenger trips in state and federal government funding formulas, and thus state and federal public transit grants to Bloomington are solely based on BT ridership and operating results. Additional state and federal funding for public transit in Bloomington would have several benefits for both IU students and the entire Bloomington community:

- The mandatory student transportation fee would be frozen at its current level for many years to come. State and federal regulations do not allow grant recipients to reduce their financial commitments to public transit when using such grants.
- More buses would be operated by both BT and IU Campus Bus Service, providing more frequent buses for both Bloomington residents and

IU students.

- Both BT and IU Campus Bus Service would have funds to upgrade their GPS so that real-time bus information could be available over the internet, on smart phones and at major bus stops.
- Additional jobs for IU students would be made available to operate the increased level of service that could be provided with money from state and federal grants.
- When older buses are (inevitably) replaced, IU Campus Bus Service would have the option of purchasing "greener" vehicles, such as hybrid-electric and electric buses, improving both the environment and sustainability of IU.

After almost three years of urging from IU students and faculty, IU administrators and BT have finally begun talks on what steps need to be taken to secure

additional state and federal funding for both BT and IU Campus Bus Service.

To date, however, the Student Transportation Board has not been involved in these negotiations. The STB has not even been briefed on the progress of the talks. I urge IU administrators to include students in the negotiation, since we pay the transportation fee and represent the vast majority of public transportation ridership for both bus services.

If students, faculty and administrators work together, we can obtain all of the federal and state public transportation funding for which we are and have been eligible.

In doing so, we will ease the financial burden on students and their parents, we will promote IU Campus Bus Service sustainability and we will ensure the future of public transportation for both the IU campus and the entire Bloomington community.