

UBC Summer U-Pass Program Feasibility Study

Introduction and Purpose

In February 2003, the students of UBC approved by Referendum a U-Pass for AMS members. However, the U-Pass as approved was only for students of the Winter session (i.e. Sept to Apr). There has been interest expressed by other potential user groups to expand the availability of the U-Pass.

In May 2003, the UBC TREK Program Centre began a study on the feasibility of a U-Pass for summer students and staff and faculty, in order to gauge interest in expanding the U-Pass program. The study focused specifically on the following areas: data on mode-split, side-trips, price preferences, and preferences regarding the length of the summer program (2 months or 4 months).

The TREK Program Centre's U-Pass Team was commissioned to perform research, conduct the focus groups/survey, analyze results, and draw conclusions regarding the feasibility of a UBC Summer U-Pass program. This report puts forward observations and issues for consideration, rather than making firm recommendations.

Methodology

An online, web-based survey was developed and appended as a pop-up window to the TREK homepage; this provided maximum 24/7 access for all students. A broadcast email was sent to all (17,000?) summer students, directing them to the survey. Just over 1550 (9%) of summer students filled out the survey.

Of the respondents, less than 6% were graduate students, while they make up half of the summer student population. This information was only apparent after the survey was finished and the data analysis begun. From informal conversations, it appears that the broadcast email did not get sent out to all graduate students. Given additional consultations with the GSS executive, focus groups, and individual students throughout printing of the U-Pass cards in September 2003, the low number of graduate responses should still allow for a reasonably representative sample.

In addition to the survey, a series of focus groups were also held to determine more qualitative information on people's values and attitudes towards the U-Pass. Selection for focus groups was conducted by word of mouth, web-site ads, poster ads, and e-mail list ads. Date of focus groups – one to two hours during one day this past July / August. Size of focus groups averaged at ten participants per session. Focus groups were held with:

- Students who take transit,
- Students who walk and bike, and
- Faculty and Staff of all modes

An attempt was made to convene a focus group of students who only drive or carpool. Although significant effort was expended, no interested participants contacted the research team. Hence, the focus groups did not include any drive-only or carpool-only students. Several do occasionally drive and/or carpool.

Analysis and Results

Overall, respondents to the survey and participants in the focus groups appear to be in favour of extending the U-Pass to the summer session.

Survey Findings

The majority of the students who answered the survey were registered in the May 5 – June 13 term, as can be seen in Figure 1. This is in spite of the fact that the survey was not distributed until the final term. It is notable that very few students were registered for classes during the month of August.

Figure 1: Respondent's Term of Study

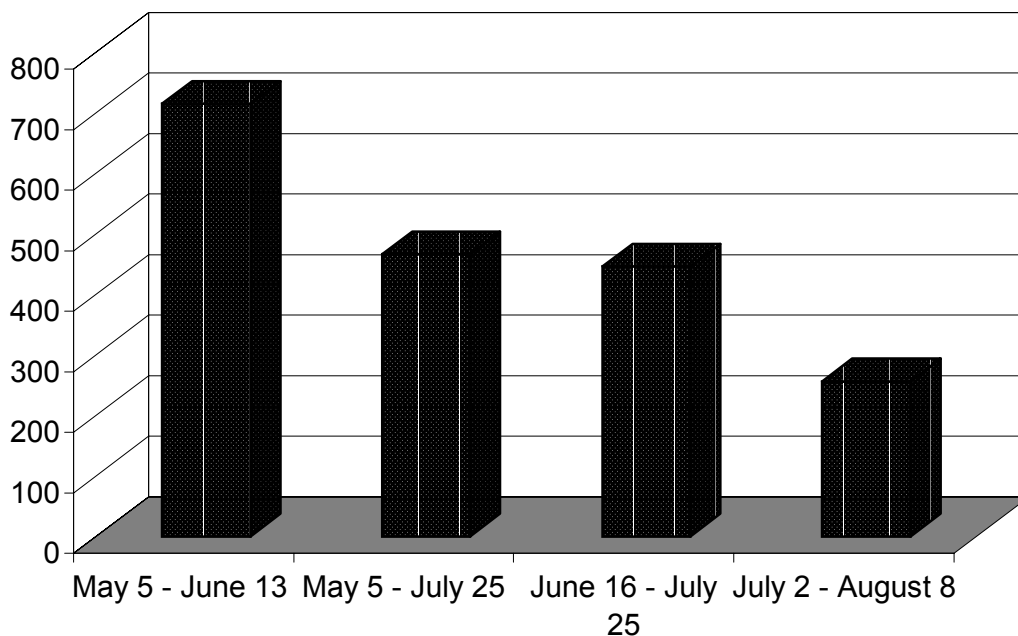


Table 1 summarizes current mode choice of respondents. Adjustments were made to remove mode bias in the analysis. Transit was the most popular choice of respondents for their trip to school. Somewhat surprising was the lack of popularity for cycling,

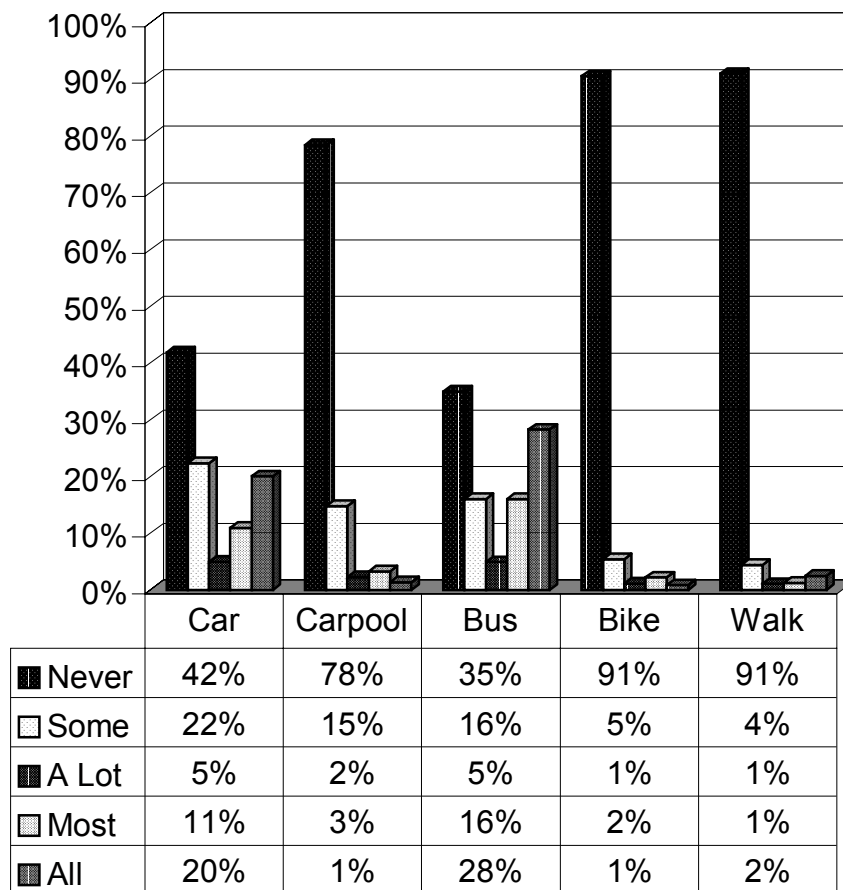
given the unparalleled summer weather and significant efforts by UBC and the City of Vancouver to promote this mode.

Table 1: Mode Choice - All Respondents

	Never	Some	A Lot	Most	All
Car	42%	22%	5%	11%	20%
Carpool	78%	15%	2%	3%	1%
Bus	35%	16%	5%	16%	28%
Bike	91%	5%	1%	2%	1%
Walk	91%	4%	1%	1%	2%

There is a great deal of modal sharing, as noted in Figure 2. Transit and cars provide important back-up choices for all other modes, which have limited appeal.

Figure 2: Trip to UBC



Just over 930 respondents, or 60%, work during the Summer Session. Of those, 21% work on campus and 79% work off campus. Table 2 details the travel to work for students with off campus jobs. There is even more mode sharing for the trip to off-

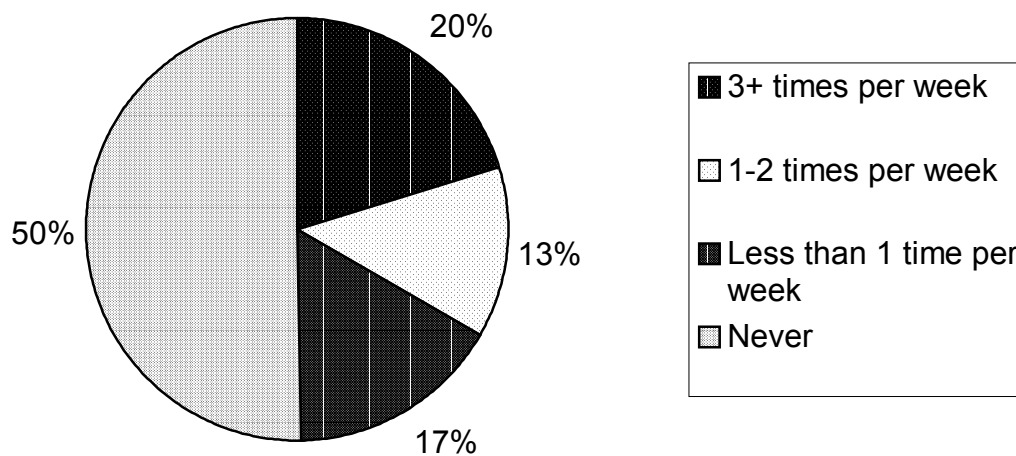
campus work, with 95% of respondents saying they travel by car, and 80% by transit, at least some of the time.

Table 2: Mode Choice to Work Off Campus

	Never	Some	A Lot	Most	All
Car	5%	24%	7%	18%	46%
Carpool	86%	10%	2%	1%	1%
Bus	20%	21%	7%	18%	34%
Bike	89%	6%	1%	3%	1%
Walk	80%	10%	2%	4%	4%

A full 30% of respondents use auto only and never take transit. Of those, exactly half said they would use the U-Pass, with a third of them saying they would use it at least once a week and a full 20% saying they would use it 3 or more times per week.

Figure 3: Expected U-Pass Usage by Non-Transit Drivers



Both the 2-month and 4-month U-Pass options received majority support from Summer students. Overall, 57% said 'yes' to a 4-month (i.e. full Summer term) mandatory U-Pass. Carpoolers are the least supportive of the extension overall, and graduate students and transit riders are the most supportive. This finding mirrors a similar study at SFU two years ago. Additionally, while 50% of car drivers who never use transit say they would use the U-Pass, only 14% to 27% would be in favour of paying for it.

Graduate and undergraduate students differ in their level of support, with graduates being more supportive, as can be seen in the charts below. This is likely a result of most graduate students attending on campus during the summer.

Table 3: Final Results

Yes to 2 Month \$40			Yes to 4 Month \$80		
Grad	70/91	77%	Grad	70/91	77%
UG	935/1457	65%	UG	711/1457	49%
Unadjusted Average = 71%			Unadjusted Average = 63%		
Adjusted = 65%			Adjusted = 56%		

When adjusted for mode bias, and grad/undergrad enrolment split, the level of support drops slightly, but is still majority support for both 2 and 4-month U-Pass, again with the not unsurprising result favouring 2-month over 4-month.

Focus Group Findings

There were a number of common themes that emerged from the focus groups. Support was strong from all the groups for an extension of the U-Pass, with a majority of participants in favour.

Major discussion points included how summer commuting and winter commuting differ, the length of a summer U-Pass term, people's expected changes in travel behaviour, their attitude towards the program in general and any additional issues that were raised.

A significant difference of opinion occurred regarding the 2-month or 4-month term length. While most of the transit riders felt comfortable paying for four months, whether or not a student was still taking courses, the cyclists and pedestrians felt uncomfortable about charging somebody who may only take a two or six week course and then leave the GVRD. Some provision should be made to address concerns of non-GVRD residents who cannot use the U-Pass, and who are only attending for a small portion of the full term.

Overall, most students at the focus groups were supportive of the Summer U-Pass. In the student transit session, 9 out of 10 participants supported a full four-month program with one dissenting opinion advocating a program that only covers the times that you are taking classes. The majority in the cyclists/pedestrians group were in favour of the U-Pass, but were not in favour of requiring all other students to buy a full-session U-Pass.

Summary & Conclusions

In general, results show that transportation choices are clearly being employed at least some of the time by a vast majority of students.

Regarding U-Pass, it would appear that UBC students will support a \$20/month, 4-month U-Pass extension to cover the Summer Session (i.e. May to August). Support is higher for a 2-month than a four-month program, but a 4-month program would likely still be approved based on the focus group and survey results. Highest levels of support come from graduate students.

The Fall 2003 success of the initial UBC U-Pass launch will likely increase support. At the time of the survey the U-Pass was still a hypothetical concept. Now that students have had time to experience its benefits, and the initial launch kinks have been worked out, support is likely much higher overall.