

CAL STATE LA'S U-PASS PROGRAM: INCREASING COLLEGE TRANSIT RIDERSHIP

FOCUS ON EFFICIENCY

Cal State LA partners with LA Metro to offer students a discounted transit pass, which resulted in a substantial increase in the number of students using mass transit to travel to the university.

The U-Pass, also known as the Universal College Student Transit Pass, is a Los Angeles Metro transit program piloted in fall 2016 providing eligible college students a 40 percent discount on the pass purchase. The pass is valid for up to 23 weeks and entitles students to unlimited rides on any Metro system in Los Angeles County.

When Cal State LA partnered with LA Metro to introduce the U-Pass program in spring 2017, the university headcount was at an all-time high with more than 28,000 enrolled students. Parking was limited due to construction projects impacting parking space on campus, and many students welcomed the U-Pass as the best transportation alternative to get to campus.

Due to an expected increase in student enrollment and insufficient parking during the 2017-2018 academic year, new student orientations focused on providing transit alternatives. Students frequently received announcements through email or social media with encouragement to use public transit to campus.

In fall 2019, a new parking structure opened, and remarkably, the U-Pass continued to be a popular transportation alternative despite the availability of new parking on campus.

The U-Pass is activated when a U-Pass sticker with embedded chip technology is placed on the student's campus ID. The identification card is then used as a transit access pass (commonly known as TAP) card to board the transit system. U-Pass sales are administered by Cal State LA, making the process much more streamlined and expeditious for students.

LA Metro invoices Cal State LA for the actual student boardings. The U-Pass is subsidized by the student success fee, the University Student Union and Cal State LA Transportation Services. The Los Angeles County systems included for U-Pass travel are LA Metro, LA DASH, Montebello bus lines, Norwalk Transit, Pasadena Transit, Long Beach Transit and Torrance Transit.

Cal State LA began its 2019-2020 academic year with the opening of a new parking structure. Despite the availability of parking, U-Pass continues to be a popular transit alternative for many students who opt not to drive to campus.

MILESTONES

Oct
2016

- Cal State LA enters into U-Pass participation agreement with LA Metro.

Nov
2016

- Cal State LA announces U-Pass through marketing materials, social media and presentations.

Jan
2017

- Cal State LA launches U-Pass and sells \$95 passes for spring semester.
- Sales surpass expectations with more than 1,000 U-Passes sold by the first week of the semester.

Aug
2017

- Fall U-Pass fee increases to a subsidized rate of \$125 per student.
- Total participation at end of the sales period is 2,188.

Jan
2018

- Spring participation reaches 2,175 students.

QUANTIFICATION AND RESULTS

Prior to implementing this program, Cal State LA's monthly sales of LA Metro college transit passes averaged 372 passes sold to students at \$43 per month. This average was used to estimate the possible number of U-Passes that would be sold in the first semester of participation.

At the inception of the program, Cal State LA surpassed the participation goal by more than 50 percent, ending the spring 2017 semester with 1,889 participating students and 331,958 Cal State LA student transit boardings.

In fall 2017, U-Pass participation rose to 2,188 students; in fall 2018, 3,568 students participated with 624,567 Cal State LA student transit boardings. By the fourth week of the fall 2019 semester, participation reached a new all-time high of 3,669 students.

In spring 2017, to be consistent with the four other participating colleges, the U-pass was sold for \$95. With growing demand, in order to maintain Cal State LA's subsidization of this program as an affordable transportation option for all university students, the U-Pass fee was increased to \$125 in fall 2017.

With the high volume of U-Pass purchase transactions, an online purchase portal was established to allow students to renew a U-Pass. This reduced lines at the Transportation Center by 50 percent.

Marketing efforts, such as speaking at orientations, sending out mass emails, signs on campus walkways, and posting messages on social media are significant factors in encouraging students to use mass transit.

IMPACT AND BENEFITS

The opportunity to participate in U-Pass came at a critical time as Cal State LA experienced a boost in college enrollment and increased demand for parking space.

Over the last two years, cost of parking rose by ten percent while the U-Pass remained at the same rate.

Cal State LA has the largest number of students participating among all the schools within the LA Metro U-Pass program.

MILESTONES

Aug
2018

- LA Metro Board approves U-Pass as a permanent program.
- Pass participation at Cal State LA reaches an all-time high of 3,568 students.

Jan
2019

- Participation falls slightly to 3,286, but Cal State LA continues to have the highest participation among schools within Metro's U-Pass program.

Aug
2019

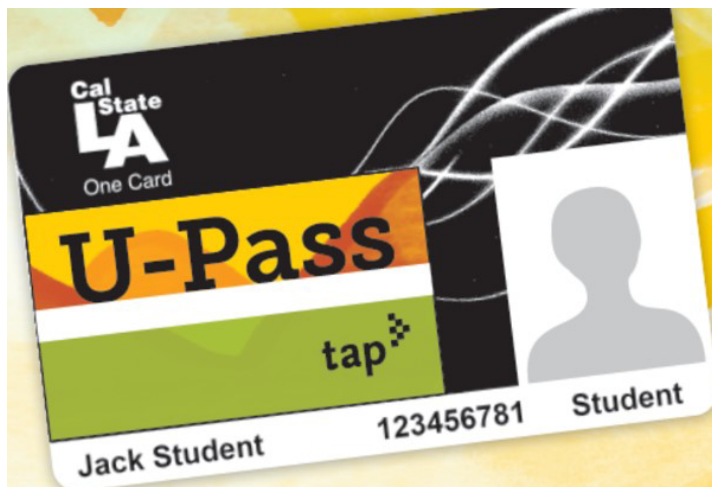
- Cal State LA opens a new parking structure.
- U-Pass online sales open for returning students, and in-person sales open for new students.
- U-Pass sales reach 3,669 students by the end of the fourth week of the semester, a new all-time high for Cal State LA.

LESSONS LEARNED

- 1 Communicating through social media is the best method to share announcements and receive feedback from college students, and a thorough and clear marketing strategy is essential.
- 2 Altering preferences from driving to public transportation can be challenging, but once the overall benefits are explained, perceptions may be changed.
- 3 Students may consider a new commute mode when they see how it can significantly reduce their out-of-pocket costs.
- 4 Plan the sales periods in advance to ensure a smooth process. Schedule support staff to assist with cashiering and to help answer questions from students in line.



Cal State LA and LA Metro signed an agreement allowing Cal State LA to administer the U-Pass program and sell semester passes at a discounted rate.



U-Pass continues to be a popular transit alternative for many students who opt not to drive to campus.

PROJECT TEAM

Carmen Gachupin

Director, Parking & Transportation Services,
Cal State LA

Betina Cervantes

Coordinator, Transportation Services, Cal
State LA

Ericka Carter

Sales Specialist, Transportation Services,
Cal State LA

Devon Deming

Communications Director, Metro Commute
Services, LA Metro

Jocelyn Feliciano

Communications Manager, Metro Commute
Services, LA Metro

FURTHER REFERENCES

Cal State LA Parking & Transportation U-Pass information:

<http://branding.calstatela.edu/parking/spring-2020-u-pass>

LA Metro U-Pass information:

<https://www.metro.net/riding/colleges/u-pass-program/>