

# 'Green' rides appeal to commuters

*Changes, additions to public, private transportation options promote alternative forms of travel*

By Lauren Fitch  
GVL Managing Editor

At first glance, owning and driving your own car around campus may seem like the most convenient, comfortable option.

However, high gas, parking permit and maintenance prices, in addition to an emphasis on sustainability, compel students to depend on alternative forms of transportation.

At Grand Valley State University, the number of parking permits sold so far this year is 10,957, compared with 12,204 for the entire 2008-09 school year and 13,219 for 2007-08, according to the Department of Public Safety.

Bob Brown, assistant director of Facilities Planning, said the decrease in purchased parking permits might be related to a variety of factors.

As fewer students drive to campus, they must find other ways of traveling such as The Rapid, taxis or shuttles.

"Students don't feel the need to bring a car to campus to get them where they need to go because of the bus system," Brown said.

The Rapid, free to GVSU students, is the most popular form of public transportation for students on the Allendale Campus.

About two million of The Rapid's estimated 9.6 million to 9.8 million riders during the

2008-09 fiscal year were GVSU students, said Jennifer Kalczuk, manager of communications and external relations for The Rapid.

From Sept. 14-18, GVSU participated in the Commuter Challenge — a competition among universities to see how many alternative miles their students can log in one week.

Although GVSU won last year, they were not victorious this year. Most of the miles logged came from Rapid travel, said Kevin Wisselink, business transportation and public outreach coordinator for The Rapid.

Another measure making The Rapid a more attractive transportation option is the recent \$5 million federal grant received as the final installment in a \$12 million grant from 2005.

The grant, announced last week, will complete The Rapid's effort to replace 32 aging buses and provide more safety and comfort for drivers and

passengers.

Kalczuk said the Federal Transit Association requires a bus be replaced after six years of service, but Rapid CEO Peter Varga said in a press release that this grant will reduce the average age of the Rapid's buses to 4.6 years.

"Having newer buses helps operation costs," Kalczuk said.

"Having newer buses helps operation costs. It's also more pleasant for passengers."

JENNIFER KALCZUK  
THE RAPID



Courtesy Photo / G.R. Hopper

**Alternative transportation:** The G.R. Hopper is one of many taxi services offered in downtown Grand Rapids

"It's also more pleasant for the passengers."

Congressman Vernon Ehlers, who helped secure the grant, said in a press release. "Keeping a modern, safe and efficient fleet of buses is one of the most costly, but important, functions of our local transit provider, and I am pleased that this grant has helped toward that end."

As The Rapid continues to upgrade and provide a valuable service, there are times students will want to go somewhere other than where the Route 37, 48 or 50 can take them.

That's where taxi services such as the G.R. Hopper step in.

Starting in August, the G.R.

Hopper travels a loop from Sixx Nightclub to the Intersection, stopping at many restaurants and bars between. The G.R. Hopper runs from 8 p.m. to 3 a.m. every Thursday, Friday and Saturday.

"Grand Rapids is growing and we want to make it more accessible," said owner Peter Woodhouse. "(The G.R. Hopper) connects with hotels, condos and also Grand Valley."

Woodhouse markets his company as a reliable designated driver for GVSU students who want to explore downtown Grand Rapids. The G.R. Hopper stops at the 50 Campus Connector stop at Seward Avenue and Lake

Michigan Drive.

Woodhouse said the low cost of \$5 for the night per person or a group rate of \$20 for five people makes it a reasonable option for students.

Regular riders can visit their Web site at <http://www.gvsu.grhopper.com> to receive updates on reduced weekend rates and VIP services at some of the clubs, including a drink special at Sixx Nightclub and a pass to the front of the line at the B.O.B. with presentation of a G.R. Hopper pass.

The two G.R. Hopper vans complete the loop every half hour and transport an average of 40 to 50 people a night.

[managingeditor@lanthorn.com](mailto:managingeditor@lanthorn.com)