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Advocating for public transit

Group aims to raise awareness about transit options for UC Irvine students, a big employer in the city.

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"Many of us depend on public transportation to get to class or get away from campus on weekends," says David Weinreich, a grad student in urban and regional planning who started the group Transit Advocates. (Courtesy Steve Zylus / December 25, 2010)



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By Joanna Clay, joanna.clay@latimes.com
December 25, 2010 | 6:11 p.m.

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For UC Irvine graduate student David Weinreich, not driving in Irvine has always been a no-brainer.

Weinreich must rely on a bike or a bus to get from A to B instead of driving himself. He cannot get behind the wheel, as he is an epileptic and could have a seizure.

Weinreich, who is pursuing a master's degree in urban and regional planning, became involved in the issue of local public transportation when the Orange County Transportation Authority cut 150,000 bus hours in March.

He regularly attended the agency's meetings and wanted OCTA to see that public transportation was important to the community.

"There were some members of OCTA questioning having it at all," he said. "A lot of people came to those meetings to show them first-hand that there are people out there that depend on transit to get around."

UCI was hit especially hard, he said, because only a handful of lines served the campus.

"When they started cutting them, just one cut would make a huge difference," he said.

As a reaction to the lack of education about transportation services in Irvine, Weinreich started a group on campus called Transit Advocates, which raises awareness about transit options for UCI students, such as OCTA and the campus's shuttle bus service. As the name implies, the group also advocates changes in the city's transit system. The group is working on getting the No. 57 OCTA line and the iShuttle to come to UCI.

The No. 57 bus misses campus by about a mile and a half. The line serves Fashion Island, South Coast Plaza, downtown Santa Ana, Angel Stadium, The Block at Orange and UCI Medical Center.

"UCI is Irvine's biggest employer," Wienreich said. "It has 27,000 students, many of them without cars. So I would say it's an important destination."

In September, Transit Advocates had its first victory. UCI approved a campus shuttle route they proposed that stops at apartment complexes on and off-campus, as well as the Irvine Spectrum and the Irvine train station. OCTA used to serve the Spectrum but the route was cut. Since its inception, the Saturday-only route has attracted 800 to 1,000 students each weekend. Introduced as a weekly pilot program, it may expand.

"It has been so popular that they need a second bus," he said.

Transit Advocates also successfully changed the 175 line, which used a small bus that quickly filled up. Weinreich learned about the problem first-hand.

"I actually had a situation once where I was waiting at the buses keep in mind they come once an hour, the driver stopped and told me I couldn't come on because the bus was full," he said. "I was like, 'I have a midterm in less than hour'. He was like, 'Tough luck'."

OCTA replaced the line with larger buses a couple of months ago.

Ali Pezeshkpour, a graduate student in Weinreich's program, saw a presentation by Transit Advocates and decided to get involved.

"Even people in our program that study urban planning didn't know there was public transportation in Irvine," he said. "If we don't know, just imagine the general population."

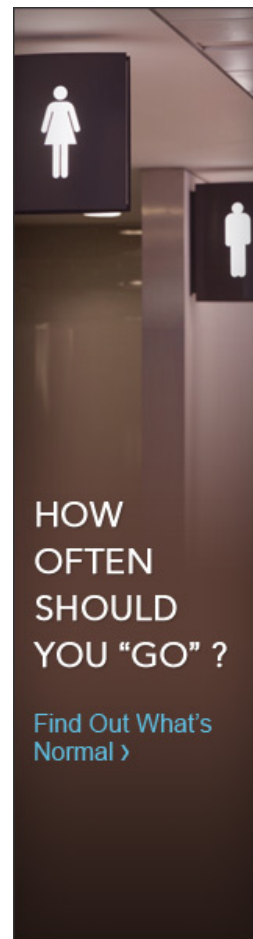
Pezeshkpour takes the role of a promoter, spreading information to interested groups, particularly freshmen and international students who are most likely to be without cars.

He wants the group to apply for the [Green Initiative Fund](#) at UCI, a sustainability grant, to finance seminars for freshmen and international students.

"We'd have pizza and brochures with graphics telling them about the bus schedule, how to plan a trip and how to reach popular destinations without a car," Pezeshkpour said.



Contact: Mark Norberg (213-237-7406) for placement. Local advertising by PaperG.



Anyone interested in helping the efforts of the Transit Advocates can visit their [website](#).

Weinreich recommends that concerned citizens leave comments on OCTA's [website](#). In early January they will be conducting a study of their transit systems to determine changes.

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