

## Overview

In 2009, Indiana University's Bloomington campus earned a tie for lowest marks in the Big Ten from the [College Sustainability Report Card – a C+](#) – no better than average among the nation's 300 most well-endowed institutions; meanwhile, “sustainability” was drawing steadily inward from the margins of higher education.

Moreover, IU earned below-average marks in transportation – a C – based on a number of considerations, which follow:

### **Alternative Vehicle Fleet**

Maintaining vehicle fleets, or a campus shuttle, running on clean-burning fuels or electricity, either for campus maintenance or for use/rent by faculty, staff, and students.

### **Mass Transit**

Providing transportation or access to public transportation systems around campus and/or to local destinations.

### **Incentives for Carpooling or Using Public Transportation**

Creating incentives for the campus community to carpool or to use public transportation.

### **Bicycle Program**

Encouraging bike use by providing more bicycle racks and offering repair services and bicycle rental or sharing.

### **Planning**

Planning and implementing a pedestrian-friendly and/or bike-friendly campus.

Creating parking policies to encourage the use of alternative modes of transportation

It was by now [well-understood](#) why IU would receive such an assessment by those standards:

The car dominated campus transportation. Parking rates weren't necessarily low, but nor were they prohibitive. According to a [2008 IU task-force report](#), annual fees were the second-cheapest in the Big Ten, and many commuters, particularly off-campus employees living more than three miles from campus, relied on single-occupancy vehicles.

In other words, many drove alone. Some carpooled, though most of those who did didn't use the [university's carpool matching service](#). In fact, only 4.6 percent of students surveyed in 2008 knew about it, and the 2008-2009 academic year saw fewer than 10 registrants.

Though IU's extensive bus system was “free” for students, faculty and staff, ridership could have been more robust, and the university had [reduced service in 2008](#) because of high fuel costs and resultant budget constraints. Students, the majority riders, complained of inefficiency and driver misconduct.

IU was not among the 42 percent of surveyed institutions with a car-sharing program, nor the 36 percent with a bike-share. Faculty, staff and students showed interest in both.

Indiana's Little 500 was still, indisputably, the most notorious college bicycle race in the U.S., featured in a movie and attended in 2008 by Barack Obama. [The City of Bloomington](#) and [Monroe County](#) each within the last year had produced a new alternative-transportation plan. Bloomington boasted several bike

shops and a community bike project, and it had been awarded bronze status as a “[Bicycle Friendly Community](#)” by the League of American Bicyclists.

It was odd, with all of this in mind, that a university [website](#) would promote cycling as if some brand-new choice...

“Bicycles get you where you need to go and are convenient to use. ...  
Give it a try, we’re sure you’ll enjoy it.”

... and fail to concede that bicycle commuting at IU could often be neither convenient nor enjoyable. Infrastructure – routes, signage, bicycle facilities – was deficient. On the road, a dissonance among cyclists, pedestrians, and motorists was palpable.

In April, IU parking operations’ Doug Porter fielded a question about developing a bike-share program. “We spent a lot of time talking about this last year,” as the price of a barrel of oil approached an all-time high, he said. “But we expected gas prices would return to normal before too long. Sure enough, they did.”

Porter continued, admitting his aversion to seeing more bicycles on the road. Inadequate infrastructure. Too much conflict. Law breaking. Let the drivers have the road. Ask during a meeting who wants to see more people bicycling, every hand goes up, he said. Ask who wants to do it themselves, all hands stay firmly on the table, eyes downcast, throats clearing, crickets chirping.

IU President Michael McRobbie had not yet signed the [American College & University Presidents’ Climate Commitment](#), a commitment to eventual carbon neutrality and an 80 percent reduction in emissions by mid-century.

Even the most stalwart might resist making a commitment so daunting in an institution of this size. But such a commitment would be symbolically powerful. Such a commitment would structure a goal to make IU “one of the greatest universities of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.”

So, boldly, envisioned the producers of a master plan – a plan that would not-so-boldly continue to prioritize the car.

## The Master Plan

*“It is understood that the population of the campus is not expected to change materially over the timeframe of the Master Plan, therefore, any change in parking demand would be expected to come not from population shifts but from behavioral changes in how people travel to, from and within the campus.”*

*- “Transportation Analyses in Support of Master Plan,” Gorove/Slade Associates, Inc.*

In 2007, McRobbie commissioned planning firms Smithgroup and JJR to produce a 20-year campus master plan; Gorove/Slade Associates, Inc. was hired specifically to assist in a [transportation analysis](#) “to complement the Plan’s future vision for the campus and to better accommodate and improve alternative modes of travel *while understanding that the private automobile will be an important and dominant travel mode over the timeframe of this Master Plan.*” (Emphasis added.)

In 2009, they finished, recommending transportation demand management measures that would conduce alternative transportation and discourage “single occupancy vehicular travel”: more on- and off-road paths; a more efficient bus system; traffic-calming and new corridors; new sidewalks; and incentives to encourage alternative modes. They also recommended pilot projects like car- and bicycle-shares. In short, they covered everything that, assessed collectively, had earned IU its “C” on the Sustainability Report Card. And those plans, if implemented, might indeed create an environment more amenable to alternative transportation and shrink IU’s carbon footprint.

A fall 2008 survey that helped the planners reach their conclusions garnered 10,293 responses from faculty, staff, and students. A respective 71 percent and 78 percent drove to campus alone, far exceeding the percentage of students who did.

86 percent of faculty expressed a willingness to consider other modes “if they became desirable.” 48 percent of staff expressed unwillingness, according to Gorove/Slade’s summary. Which means that 52 percent did not.

The planners didn’t intend to reduce parking supply. They planned, instead, to accommodate an assumed stable number of vehicular commuters to more quickly reach parking spaces closer, on average, to their given destinations.

In other words, they wastefully planned to construct parking spaces whose use they hoped to discourage.

Instead, IU should complement initiatives, incentives and investments that would decrease “single occupancy vehicular travel” with a *decrease in parking supply and an increase in parking rates over time.*

The Office of Sustainability should position itself as a constructive critic of IU’s master plan, and the potential impacts of my suggestion to decrease parking supply would be worth assessing. In a “sustainable” context, such an assessment may show whether and how the current plan might discourage alternative choices over the short run and the long, while forecasting the costs and benefits of altering it in a specific way (i.e., setting a goal for long-term parking-supply reduction and increasing permit fees).

Changes in individual behavior are essential, but behavior, we know, is slower to change if policies do not compel it. “If you build it, they will come” is true, but it begs a question: “What if you don’t build it?”

### **Continuing and Future Projects**

My job title in the spring of 2009 was “bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure” intern. The above recommendation may seem outside of my assigned realm, but I was drawn to the parking issue because I see the plans as potentially crippling for efforts toward transportation sustainability over the next 20 years. If I was going to focus on infrastructure improvement, I also had to focus on what would deter people from taking advantage of it.

From the beginning of my internship, I foresaw limited opportunity in my short-term and independent position to effect change in campus infrastructure, especially when the city, the county and the university all had their own plans, and after my mentor lamented during our interview that she’d for years, futilely, been beseeching the university for money to make infrastructure improvements.

There are, however, projects future interns can undertake that may prove useful to university decision-makers, particularly if the Office of Sustainability and its interns can forge closer advisory roles with other important offices and administrators. Some ideas follow.

### **Bicycle parking & amenities**

The Office could take over an unfinished initiative by the Volunteers in Sustainability (ViS) to collect data on rack usage in key locations over the course of a year. Such information would instruct IU parking operations (responsible for investing in bicycle parking) if and as it seeks to correct deficiencies in the short term, even if rack-space scarcity is not a yearlong problem.

One idea for correcting deficiencies has been investing in portable racks. That may prove a good idea in the short term. Over the long term, however, and especially as the face of campus changes with the implementation of the master plan, it may be better – and necessary – for IU to develop a redistributive plan for bike parking, a la the master plan’s aforementioned auto-parking scheme. With the help of groups like ViS, (a) future intern(s) could research how to make bike parking more efficient over time.

The Office could assist in researching costs, best locations and designs of indoor or covered bicycle parking, and other amenities like shower facilities, the installation of which would earn IU buildings LEED-certification points.

It could also encourage non-university commercial and residential property owners – who may find LEED- or other “green” certification alluring – to add or upgrade their own bicycle parking or indoor facilities.

### **Bike & Bus Map**

The “Bloomington Bike & Bus Map” created in 2008 by Julie Harpring and Mike Steinhoff ought to be combined with the City of Bloomington’s bike and bus map; I and a city planning intern undertook that project this semester but did not finish. Joe Fish of the city oversaw. Once completed, the map should be made relatively easy to update as existing bus routes change and alternative-infrastructure plans are implemented. The map should be under the aegis of the city, which is better equipped for long-term oversight.

## **Bicycle Programs**

The Office ought to vigorously pursue developing a bicycle program like those that have proliferated in recent years, of which [Bike Emory](#) might be the stand-out, for its comprehensive approach to encouraging cycling, from education to discounted bikes-for-purchase to a multi-station bike-share. Emory is in many ways not comparable to IU – it’s smaller, milder, and flatter – but those descriptors cannot be the sole reasons for its compulsion to encourage cycling. And IU’s lack of those descriptors should not necessarily excuse it from developing programs that could be tailored specifically to its own environment.

Pacific Cycle manufactures the bikes ridden in the Little 500. The discounted bikes Emory sells and the bikes in its sharing program are made by Fuji, with whom it has an exclusive partnership. IU could apply such a model and expand its relationship with Pacific to achieve the same, if Pacific were receptive to the idea.

Bike Emory also partners with Bicycle South, an Atlanta bicycle purveyor and repair shop, for its on-campus maintenance needs. It assists with both stationary and mobile repair on campus. In Bloomington, IU might find partners in the Bloomington Community Bike Project, Revolution Cycles or other shops. To keep cost of operations modest, IU could, like Emory, investigate ways to safeguard against damage and theft, and create internships or work-study positions to manage the program.

To those ends, I recommend the Office of Sustainability create an internship position to determine the feasibility of different bicycle-program models on IU’s campus. The same or another intern could locate funding sources and attempt to strike partnerships with bicycle manufacturers and repair shops.