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Nonstop no more?

Transit agencies are using
VW settlement money
to replace UC Davis'
popular shuttles and some
riders are not happy

BY DYLAN SVOBODA

Sacramento Regional Transit and the Yolo County
Transportation District are preparing to launch
electric bus service between UC Davis and
Sacramento, but changes brought by the move have
some students and employees upset.

In partnership with RT and YoloBus, UC
Davis is replacing its private, nonstop inter-campus
shuttles with 12 publicly-run electric buses thanks to
a grant from Electrify America, an initiative funded
by Volkswagen's 2016 diesel emissions settlement.

Officials are still hashing out the final details
before the new service is scheduled to start in April.
The RT board had been scheduled to approve the
plan Monday night, but instead decided to take a
closer look at schedules and stops, and told staff
to meet with current riders before the board meets
again on Dec. 9. Already, in response to rider
concerns, planners say there will be three buses an
hour during peak commute times, including some
nonstops.

But some riders are still worried.

Derek Young says his commute could
double some days as his trip goes
from no stops to four. "Traffic
across the causeway is already
brutal," Young said. "Add in
a couple stops in Sacramento
and possibly through West
Sacramento—we could be
talking about over an hour
between the med center and
main campus."

Matt Dulcich, UCD's
director of environmental
planning, said the university is
working with the other agencies
to develop an express, nonstop route
during peak hours to reduce commute
times.

But smaller buses have Young worried there
won't be enough room for all passengers waiting
to board. The electric buses will have 33 seats
compared to 56 in the current shuttles. Dulcich
said he hopes that more trips by the electric bus



Passengers board the shuttle
in front of the Mondavi
Center at UC Davis before
heading to UC Davis Medical
Center in Sacramento.

will be able to accommodate new riders on top of
current ones.

While university officials assume most riders
will switch over to the new system, Jason Moore,
a UC Davis professor who uses the shuttle as his
primary transportation between his Sacramento
home and the university, says many folks won't.

"It's a bearable ride when you're able to work or
take a nap," Moore said. "Take those options away
and the ride becomes much less attractive."

University officials said shuttle ridership has
fallen from 150,000 to 90,000 per year over the last
half decade.

Some supporters of the current shuttle service
question using Electrify America funds to add one
form of transit while taking away another one.
Moore says the new system may lead him and other
riders to ditch mass transit altogether, potentially
putting more cars on the road.

"A lot of shuttle riders will just choose not to
take the public buses and drive to work instead."

Moore predicted. "Some of us have centered our
entire lives around the shuttle by going
car-free or moving near stops. Now
all that's changing in the blink of
an eye."

While some current shuttle
riders deride the changes as
potentially backward, the
university heralds its new
"Causeway Connection" as
an effort to make the trip
between the two cities more
affordable.

"For a few years, UC
Davis has been looking for ways
to expand the Davis-Sacramento
transportation service for its existing riders
while also giving a greater number of people in
Sacramento and Davis communities affordable
transportation options between the two cities,"
UC Davis spokeswoman Melissa Lutz Blouin
wrote in an email. "We believe that the Causeway
Connection partnership will do just that."

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Jason Moore
mechanical and aerospace
engineering professor,
UC Davis