

**STUDENT SENATE BILL 2024-1325**

**TITLE: Resolution Advocating for the University of Florida and the City of Gainesville to Come to an Agreement Ensuring Students Have Equitable and Reliable Access to the Gainesville Regional Transit System (RTS)**

**AUTHOR(S): Transportation Caucus Chair and Off-Campus Senator Nathaniel Pelton, Graduate Senator Antonio Hendricks, Deputy Minority Party Leader Max Banach, Senator Victoria Peters, Senator Fahim Islam, Senator Vivian Phung**

**SPONSOR(S): University Singers Treasurer Michael Lim, Graduate Senator Abigail Butka, Professional Senator Jordan Stokes, Senator Meagan Lamey, Transportation Caucus Vice-Chair Hunter Monson, Minority Party Leader Anamika Naidu, Senator Isha Khan, Girls Who Code Secretary Tanya Charan, Asian American Student Union Vice President of Education Joaquin R.C. Marcelino, Senator Ronan Hart, Senator Anghelo Gangano, YDSA Co-Chair Allan Frasher, YDSA Co-Chair Qingyu Zheng, YDSA Treasurer Stephen Sykes, YDSA Secretary Hannah Letzelter, YDSA Membership Director Nelson Calles, Indian Student Association Co-President Darshna Bhatt, Indian Student Association Co-President Hansa Pasyavala, and Senator Conor Ruffin**

**WHEREAS**, the Gainesville Regional Transit System (RTS) is a crucial component of the city's public transportation network, offering accessible, reliable, and efficient transit options to the University of Florida (UF) students, faculty, staff, and the broader community; and,

**WHEREAS**, the Gainesville RTS has faithfully served the Gainesville area, including the University of Florida and Santa Fe College, for 50 years since its inception as a small private company before becoming a vital public service [1]; and,

**WHEREAS**, one of the Regional Transit System's (RTS) guiding principles is "strengthen[ing] community partnerships" through "partner[ing] with Gainesville RTS to improve transit efficiency and prepare for the future" [2]; and,

**WHEREAS**, the University of Florida's Campus Master Plan outlines the goals for campus development, containing goals and objectives including "reduce(ing) the dependence on single-occupant vehicles as a primary mode of travel to campus"; and,

**WHEREAS**, the availability of quality public transportation like RTS contributes significantly to the reduction of traffic congestion, parking difficulties, and carbon emissions, thus enhancing the quality of life and environmental health in Gainesville; and,

**WHEREAS**, the RTS system provides a safe, cost-effective, and convenient mode of transportation for UF students, thereby facilitating access to education, employment opportunities, and essential services; and,

**WHEREAS**, responses to the Campus Transportation Survey (CTS) found that “nearly 38% of students currently use RTS to get around campus at least twice a week and 45% use it to get to and from campus at least twice a week” [2]; and,

**WHEREAS**, University of Florida ridership accounts for 3.4 million out of 5 million RTS trips for the fiscal year 2023 [8]; and,

**WHEREAS**, students, faculty, and administration from the University of Florida are projected to comprise over 68% of the ridership for Gainesville’s Regional Transit System (RTS) by the end of fiscal year 2024, with 3.9 million trips by UF riders [3]; and,

**WHEREAS**, at its peak in 2013, college students made up over 75% of RTS riders with over 7.4 million trips taken by University of Florida students within a singular year [4] [12]; and,

**WHEREAS**, ridership has been on an upward trend since COVID-19, but overall UF ridership remains 54% below its peak levels in 2013, while UF has increased its financial contribution by 13.6% [10]; and,

**WHEREAS**, there is a notable disparity between the average cost per ride for UF students compared to Gainesville residents as “RTS charges \$1.50 to non-UF riders and on average \$2.86 to UF riders” [10]; and,

**WHEREAS**, the University of Florida, in response to this data, submitted an initial budget proposal of \$570,000 per month as opposed to \$13,700,000 per year in the previous agreement [11]; and,

**WHEREAS**, the City of Gainesville “expects to eliminate 11 of its 39 routes, including all 5 campus routes” in response to the initial budget proposal [3] potentially affecting state and federal funding tied to ridership volume; and,

**WHEREAS**, the proposed budget is expected to turn 611 transit trips into an average of 8,200 vehicular trips leading to intensified road congestion, delays in travel, and increased safety concerns [4]; and,

**WHEREAS**, “additional analysis is needed in order to quantify the magnitude of environmental impacts” [4]; and,

**WHEREAS**, Amalgamated Transit Union President Zefnia Durham III stated, “Between 52 and 65 jobs will be lost”, and further stated, “And I think that’s like a best-case scenario so it may even be worse” [5]; and,

**WHEREAS**, the City of Gainesville Commissioner At-Large 1 Cynthia Chestnut stated, “This is very drastic. I don't think we've ever faced this before, but to take student fees and where they have directed these fees, and to say that now you're going to cut these routes, is just unbelievable”, and further stated, “We must not allow this”, condemning the university’s proposal to withdraw funding from the Regional Transit System [6]; and,

**WHEREAS**, the City of Gainesville Mayor Harvey Ward stated, “This is not a sustainable action for the system; we will not be able to offer the level of service that our community is used to because this won’t just affect University of Florida students... This will also obviously affect faculty and staff of the University of Florida, but it will disproportionately affect the remainder of the system, as well” [7]; and,

**WHEREAS**, Mayor Harvey Ward further went on to say that, “If... it occurs to you, ‘Well, I don’t ride the bus,’... it does affect you”, and that if fewer members of the UF community are able to utilize the Regional Transit System, that will lead to increased amounts of traffic and parking issues due to an influx of students driving to make it to classes [7]; and,

**WHEREAS**, Steve Orlando, UF’s Associate Vice President for Communications, stated that “[w]e’re committed to doing what’s right for our students and the community” in relation to the ongoing negotiations between the University of Florida and the City of Gainesville [1]; and,

**WHEREAS**, David Kratzer, UF’s Senior Vice President of construction, facilities and auxiliary stated that “[t]he university will always take a data-driven approach to ensure that we are correctly serving our students. Press conferences and threats of closures are unnecessary and unhelpful” [13]; and

**WHEREAS**, UF administration has opened further lines of communication with the City of Gainesville so that a numerical analysis of the stated “\$84 an hour rate per bus” can be optimized to ensure fairness for UF students [13]; and,

**WHEREAS**, it was recently stated in a press release that “[t]he Gainesville City Commission and city leaders are hopeful the ongoing negotiations will lead to a full contract renewal before the June 30 deadline, and that UF over the coming year will conduct research to analyze the traffic, safety and environmental impacts that could be expected citywide if major changes are made to the RTS-UF partnership” [13]; and

**WHEREAS**, Steve Orlando recently announced that “[e]veryone at the table agreed both to continue talks on a weekly basis and to keep details at the negotiating table as we work through these important conversations together” [13]; then,

**THEREFORE, LET IT BE RESOLVED THAT** the Student Senate of the University of Florida recognizes the need for public transportation taking students to and from the campuses of Santa Fe and the University of Florida; and,

**THEREFORE, LET IT FURTHER BE RESOLVED THAT** the Student Senate of the University of Florida recognizes the need for public transportation for student and non-student residents of the City of Gainesville for tasks such as buying groceries or going to the hospital; and,

**THEREFORE, LET IT FURTHER BE RESOLVED THAT** the Student Senate advocates for continued and enhanced collaboration between the University of Florida and the Gainesville RTS to ensure the sustainability, efficiency, and effectiveness of the transit services; and,

**THEREFORE, LET IT FURTHER BE RESOLVED THAT** the Student Senate encourages the university's administration and the City of Gainesville to consider and quantify the broader impacts of any changes to the RTS program, including the environmental benefits of mass transit and the necessity of reliable transportation for accessing education and employment; and,

**THEREFORE, LET IT FURTHER BE RESOLVED THAT** the Student Senate of the University of Florida affirms the need to evaluate the best possible combination of services including RTS, SNAP, Gator Lift, Campus Connector, and UF Safe Rides to maximize utility and availability for student transportation; and,

**THEREFORE, LET IT FURTHER BE RESOLVED THAT** the Student Senate of the University of Florida encourages the City of Gainesville and university administration to evaluate all applicable data to ensure that the student body is charged a fair amount for the services provided by RTS; and,

**THEREFORE, LET IT FINALLY BE RESOLVED THAT** the Student Senate urges the University of Florida and the City of Gainesville to finalize their ongoing negotiations before July 1<sup>st</sup> in the best interest of students and Gainesville residents alike.

*Proviso: A copy of this resolution shall be sent to former Senator and co-author Michael Lim, University of Florida's Associate Vice President of Communications Steve Orlando, University of Florida President Ben Sasse, University of Florida Student Body President Olivia Green, University of Florida Student Body President-Elect John Brinkman*

[1] <https://alachuachronicle.com/gainesville-public-transit-celebrates-50-years-of-service/>

[2] <https://taps.ufl.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/TransportationStrategicPlan.pdf>

[3] [https://www.gainesvillefl.gov/News-articles/RTS-Budget?fbclid=IwAR2BzhR1DiXZWSxUdSk9ilMFMuxhhCKI67blliq\\_PWkDBFmXxDZLZnmLjg4\\_aem\\_ASn5FAkVMmaZ\\_QBhP8Fv7MuE9oCqyEI53CSL4C7cD4IBGdhKaSKaUSEFcZDhBF4Spjk](https://www.gainesvillefl.gov/News-articles/RTS-Budget?fbclid=IwAR2BzhR1DiXZWSxUdSk9ilMFMuxhhCKI67blliq_PWkDBFmXxDZLZnmLjg4_aem_ASn5FAkVMmaZ_QBhP8Fv7MuE9oCqyEI53CSL4C7cD4IBGdhKaSKaUSEFcZDhBF4Spjk)

[4] <https://www.gainesvillefl.gov/files/assets/public/v/1/transportation/overview-of-the-community-impacts-assictaed-with-uf-transit-service-reductions.pdf>

[5] <https://www.wcjb.com/2024/04/09/city-officials-respond-possible-cuts-city-bus-system/>

- [6] <https://www.gainesville.com/story/news/local/2024/04/09/university-of-florida-bus-proposal-puts-gainesville-rts-at-risk/73260932007/>
- [7] <https://alachuachronicle.com/not-something-we-can-sustain-or-major-misunderstanding-mayor-ward-goes-public-with-rts-funding-dispute-between-uf-and-city/>
- [8] <https://www.gainesvillefl.gov/News-articles/Gainesville-public-transit-celebrates-50-years-of-service#:~:text=In%20FY23%2C%20the%20number%20of,disabilities%20totalled%20more%20than%20518%2C000.>
- [9] <https://www.alligator.org/article/2024/04/whats-happening-with-rts-from-the-uf-student-body-president-elect>
- [10] <https://pub-cityofgainesville.escribemeetings.com/FileStream.ashx?DocumentId=88044>
- [11] [https://ufdcimages.uflib.ufl.edu/AA/00/06/32/58/00001/Schneider\\_Delaney\\_Thesis.pdf](https://ufdcimages.uflib.ufl.edu/AA/00/06/32/58/00001/Schneider_Delaney_Thesis.pdf)
- [12] <https://www.gainesville.com/story/news/local/2024/04/22/uf-administration-city-leaders-continue-rts-negotiations/73412228007/>



4/25/24

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Monish Vijayaraghavan  
Senate President

Date