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LOWDOWN, PAGE 1B



PHOTO BY SEAN COOK/THE STATE NEWS

The State News

TRANSIT

Cities study possible light rail transport through E.L.

By Jeff Kanan
THE STATE NEWS

The cars and buses that streak down Grand River Avenue could have company in the form of another mode of travel if an ongoing study into a light rail connecting East Lansing to neighboring cities stays on track.

East Lansing and other area officials are conducting an analysis of whether adding a light rail that connects cities near Lansing would be feasible.

City Manager Tom Staton said it would likely take several years before any construction would begin, but the study is the first step in the process.

Possible light rail systems include a rubber-tired vehicle with designated lanes in the road, a vehicle that runs on a railway or an elevated vehicle. Staton said installing a light rail could provide several economic benefits.

"In many cities where a light rail has been developed there's been extensive development along the corridor, so I think you could see more commercial involvement and more entertainment options for students and nonstudent residents," Staton said.

"It would be great for economic development and a great way to protect the environment."

The idea for the light rail was brought up during a recent task force meeting attended by city leaders.

Staton said the rail would connect East Lansing to Lansing and Meridian Township, but nothing has been finalized.

He said the light rail could be funded by state or federal

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THE BUILDING BLOCKS OF MICHIGAN



PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY JOCH RADTKE AND LIZ KERSJES | THE STATE NEWS

E.L. firm looks to prove a stable state economy depends on universities

By Jacob Carpenter
THE STATE NEWS

As the state budget continues to shrink and higher education funding declines by millions, the work of a local consulting group rarely has been more crucial to Michigan universities building their case for more support.

East Lansing-based consulting firm Anderson Economic Group's economic impact studies involving the state's three largest universities — MSU, the University of Michigan and Wayne State University, collectively known as the University Research Corridor — have shown the impact of higher education on the state.

The schools combine for about \$3 billion in net economic impact, a 3.5 percent growth in economic impact from 2007-08 and more than \$25 billion in wages and salaries for alumni living in Michigan.

"It's a phenomenon that has really grown over the last eight to 10 years, and makes a lot of sense given the importance of allocating scarce dollars," said Steve Webster, MSU's vice president of government affairs and the firm's main contact for its studies. "More and more, stakeholders, such as the Michigan Legislature, want to know what is the economic benefit to the state and the region by investing in

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For PDFs of two Anderson Economic Group studies, visit stateneews.com.

"It is very important to make your case and show hard data as to what you're able to do and how you affect the state and the economy. I think it would be difficult to make claims of your value when you don't have numbers to back it up."

Rep. Vincent Gregory, D-Southfield

STUDENT GOV'T

Simon to meet with ASMSU about state budget, tuition

By Chris Vannini
THE STATE NEWS

ASMSU members will get the chance to voice their concerns about possible tuition increases and other issues to MSU President Lou Anna K. Simon tonight when she meets with the organization's two assemblies.

ASMSU is MSU's undergraduate student government.

Student Assembly Chairperson Michael Webber said a visit by Simon presents the perfect opportunity for the two assemblies to meet.

"It's a good time to get together and collaborate with different issues the assemblies have," he said.

Simon will talk to the assemblies about tuition and the state budget, among other topics, Webber said.

"It's given us a direct line to the top to speak about student issues," Webber said. "It's good for her to give us feedback on our initiatives."

This will be the second joint meeting ASMSU has held this year. The first joint meeting was Sept. 10.

ASMSU's Academic Assembly deals with issues regarding academic issues, such as tuition and book costs. Student Assembly deals with nonacademic issues and represents ASMSU to administration and government bodies.

"This hasn't usually been practiced in the past, but it's in our policy that we can do it," said Brad McDonald, Academic Assembly interim chairperson. "In the past, the two assemblies often weren't aware of what each other were doing."

Simon usually meets with ASMSU's assemblies once per year, but beginning this year, each assembly chairperson has met with Simon once per month, McDonald said.

"We can bring up any questions that we or the assembly have," he said. "It's a great opportunity for ASMSU."

Kyle Dysarz, Student Assembly vice chairperson for external affairs, said it's important for the students communicate with university administration.

"That's what we're about —

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WRESTLERS READY
MSU wrestling heads to State College, Pa. this weekend for the Big Ten Championships, page 6A

Weather
Mostly cloudy
High 50° | Low 45°
Three-day forecast, Page 2A

CRIME

E.L. police warn students of spring break burglaries

By Kyle Feldscher
THE STATE NEWS

As students leave East Lansing for sunny, warm beaches, police are gearing up to make sure the items they leave behind are protected.

East Lansing Police Chief Tom Wibert said theft and home invasion typically spike during spring break, mainly because of the mass exodus of students from town. He said crimes may not be reported until students return, but it's fairly obvious when they occur.

"I've worked here for a long time," Wibert said. "Those days for students come back, we'll have several reports of incidents when they find that their places have been broken into."

Wibert said spring break is unlike other breaks in the

"Those days that students come back, we'll have several reports of incidents when they find that their places have been broken into."

Tom Wibert, East Lansing police chief

school year, such as between the fall and spring semesters, when some students stay in town. Spring break represents a situation where many people leave town for a week to get away from the pressures of school, leaving homes vulnerable to burglary.

T.J. Rankin, a secondary education junior, said he's worried about how protected his apartment will be over

break. Rankin said his apartment was burglarized in September. A laptop and hundreds of dollars were stolen while he and his brother slept.

"Anyone who is rational would be worried about being broken into," he said.

Rankin stressed the importance of taking simple measures to protect apartments and houses while out of town. He said he might not have been robbed if his patio door had been locked at the time of the burglary.

"We didn't have a lock on the patio, but we got one installed so it doesn't happen again."

Rankin said.

Students living off campus are not the only ones who should take measures to avoid becoming victims of crime while they're away.

Director of Residence Life Paul Goldblatt said he's confident in the security of MSU residence halls, but the absence of students from campus can present the opportunity for thieves to strike.

"When you have less people in the hall during break, other people think it's a great time to get in," he said.

"They can try and find an unlocked door or break into certain rooms where they know something is."

Goldblatt said the best way to keep thieves from taking valuables is to take them home with you. He said small items, such as iPods and laptops, often are targets for

potential burglars.

"Thieves aren't taking a 50-inch plasma TV out of a residence hall," he said. "If something is that small, and that valuable, just take it with you."

Wibert said potential criminals also can be discouraged by the appearance that someone is home in a house or apartment. He suggested students have a neighbor pick up mail or newspapers that may accumulate, if possible.

"A lot of the times, it'll snow and you can tell who's gone by just by the tracks in the snow," he said.

"If a neighbor is staying behind, they could take care of shoveling the walk and making the house look like it's lived-in."
Staff writer Kate Jacobson contributed to this report.