Renovation of a Rutgers Space for Use as a Commuter Lounge to Reduce Our Carbon Footprint

Creating an exclusive facility to solve commuter problems within Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ

Tag words: Commuter; students; problems; neglected; Rutgers; naps; gas; health; lounge; center; New Jersey

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Summary

Many Rutgers commuting students have the problem of deciding where to go in-between classes. A lot of commuters want to be able to take a rest to recharge their system before their next lecture in order to stay alert and not fall asleep in class. Unfortunately, there is no place to do that unless you go to your car, which is not the most comfortable place. Sure, Rutgers provides some lounges with couches and chairs, but they are inadequate for a good nap and do not have the proper amenities that commuters need. There are too many disturbances with people chatting and walking up and down the halls, which does not provide for a serene environment and there is nowhere to eat or heat up food. Our goal is to create the ideal environment for commuting students that solve the problems that they have with a commuter center. Please help us do this by signing our petition: http://chn.ge/ILTPJZ

Video link
http://youtu.be/vu6kW8i2kgU

Commuters: The neglected majority

(ML) Many Rutgers commuting students have the problem of deciding where to go in-between classes. A lot of commuters want to be able to take a rest to recharge their system before their next lecture in order to stay alert and not fall asleep in class. Unfortunately, there is no place to do that unless you go to your car, which is not the most comfortable place. Sure, Rutgers provides some lounges with couches and chairs, but they are inadequate for a good nap. There are too many disturbances with people chatting and walking up and down the halls, which does not provide for a serene environment.

The technical definition of a commuter is somebody who travels regularly between places, especially between home and work (Encarta World English Dictionary). In our case it is someone who travels between home and school, but there are many different cases within
Rutgers. The amount of commuters at Rutgers is unknown. This is because Rutgers cannot determine who is living on campus and off. There are people who live in off-campus housing, which is technically living around campus, but this group is not considered residents since housing is not through Rutgers. You might say to just look at how many people are assigned parking passes, but this population includes faculty, staff, as well as residents. Also, some people take the train, so they do not acquire passes and others choose not to buy parking passes and park at the meters around New Brunswick or at Sears, both nearby the campus, and take the bus around. Trying to find the exact amount of the commuter population is impossible, which is why it is important to look at this substantial population’s needs.

Being a commuter is hard enough as it is. We have to go through the routine of driving to school, occasionally getting stuck in traffic, searching for parking, walking to class, then doing the reverse when class is over to go home. It is time consuming and a very tiring process when you have to allocate an hour or more in order to get to class on time. Many commuters do not have the luxury of living close to campus and therefore are not able to drive home to eat or take a quick nap before their next class. Some breaks are just not long enough to drive back and forth from school to home, or the trip becomes another inconvenience. The University makes it even more difficult as each campus runs on different class time schedules, only leaving about 20 minutes to get from one campus to the other. The life of a college student is hard and tiring as it is, add the commute and it becomes exhausting.

Commuting students are the neglected majority at many universities, including Rutgers. Many institutions are so wrapped around resident student needs that they tend to neglect commuters. When in reality, commuters are usually the majority and outnumber residents by about three to one (Educational Facilities Lab 8). Residents are provided with the convenience of being close to everything the University has to offer, which has showed that a positive influence on cognitive skills. A study conducted by the National Center on Postsecondary Teaching, Learning, and Assessment showed that residing on campus enhances cognitive and intellectual growth as well as student values, attitudes, and personal development. They attribute it not only to the coursework and academic involvement, but to social and intellectual interaction with peers and faculty, which is more likely to occur if students live on campus than if they commute (Pascarella 11).

Residents then are already at an advantage because they are able to easily immerse themselves into college life; building relationships in their dormitories and are accessible to the programs and services the University has to offer. Commuting students have to worry about making it to class on time, let alone being involved with school work and activities. Commuters pay the same amount per credit and have to work just as hard as resident students do. Yes, we do have commuter lounges for studying and places to eat within the campus center, but there is no place to sleep. Residents can easily take a bus back over to their dorms to take a quick nap, but commuters lack that kind of vicinity. By installing this commuter resting lounge, it would help reduce the resident advantage by providing a similar facility.

This facility will not only help commuters, but the environment too. Of course emissions from an individual car are nowhere near comparison to what industry smokestacks produce. But, in a lot of cities around the country, a vehicle is one of the single greatest sources of air pollution as
emissions from millions of vehicles on the road add up (US Environmental Protection Agency). “Mobile sources” represent the largest contributor to air toxics, which are pollutants known or suspected to cause cancer or other serious health or environmental effects. These emissions are responsible for up to 50 percent of the emissions that form ground-level ozone and up to 90 percent of carbon monoxide in major metropolitan areas (Illinois EPA). By commuters driving their car back and forward from home to campus just to take a break, they are emitting more waste then needed.

Figure 1:

![Annual Greenhouse Gas Emissions by Sector](image)

Figure 1 shows that transportation fuels make up one of the top 3 that contribute to the annual greenhouse gas emissions. Through commuting alone, we make up 14% of waste being emitted into the air.

Contaminating the environment adds on to the rest of the problems commuters have to deal with. Driving a car is the most polluting act an average person can commit (Alpha Nutrition). Air pollution can poison people by allowing them to breathe contaminated air and cause global effects, like altering the weather and damaging resources such as plants. The air is becoming more polluted by gas fumes from cars due to the fact bigger, and more fuel-consuming, cars are being manufactured as time goes by (Alpha Nutrition). The more one gets stuck in traffic, the more gas is wasted and fills the air. The best solution to this problem is to reduce motor vehicle use and commit more to public transportation, but that is also another problem within our environment that only the government can fix.
Not only are commuters polluting our environment, they are also spending lots of money on gas to drive up and down from school or work. According to the AltTransport Community, an average American commuter spends about 34 hours in traffic, along with spending about $808 extra on gas for their commute (AltTransport 2011). With the recession still going on, gas prices keep going up, leaving commuters with lesser money than started with, which is also making it even more difficult to afford on-campus housing. Traffic is the worst during the mornings between the hours of 7am-9am, when commuters are on their way to class or work, and during the hours of 4pm-6pm, when commuters are on their way home. Lots of gas becomes wasted when being stuck such traffic. The time you sit in your car stuck in traffic, barely or not even moving at all, that gas still burns up and goes into our air, contaminating our environment.

**Commuting Results in Health Risks**

(KS) Naps have been revealed to improve almost every condition of better health. There are many benefits to the body that include better heart functioning, hormonal maintenance, and cell repair (Dinges and Broughton). The benefits result in greater alertness, improved memory retention and creative insight. Napping can improve anything you do that requires complex and coordinated motor skills. Also, a nap’s effects on mental health include improved mood, lowered stress, and greater psychological balance. (Fishbein and Tucker 197). Facts demonstrate that students are easily fatigued from their daily routine of classes and work that is required by classes.

Figure 2:

![Histogram of times surveyed 276 young adults which hours of the day they have difficulty staying awake (Dinges and Broughton). It shows that the majority say they get tired at around six o’clock in the afternoon. This makes a lot of sense because a lot of college students do not like getting up early in the morning, scheduling afternoon classes. They have the tendency](image-url)
to wake up later in the morning, close to noon. According to Sara Mednick’s study, there are
three nap phases, and each phase helps in its own way. REM sleep is the first period that is
supposed to inspire creativity and heighten perception. The second stage, called stage 2 sleep,
occurs 5 hours after wake-up time, and is what she claims to be the best time to take a nap. This
stage is the period that increases alertness and motor skills. The last stage, slow-wave sleep,
helps improve memory and clears your mind (Mednick). So whichever nap period you fall asleep
in, you will reap benefits.

There have also been many reports that show that short naps during the day help boost your
memory and remember facts. This is important, especially for college students come exam time.
In an experiment conducted by Lahl and his associates, they tested two control groups where
each group was to remember a list of words after an hour that was either filled with daytime
napping or waking activity. Their study showed that memory performance was significantly
enhanced after napping as opposed to waking (Lahl, et al. 5). Another experiment was designed
to explain the role of total sleep time. They found that even a very short period of sleep is
adequate to improve memory processing. (Lahl, et al. 7). An afternoon nap is supposed to restore
alertness and helps performance and learning (Dhand 380). Several studies have shown that naps
of less than thirty minutes provide performance benefits; even napping for as short as ten
minutes improves performance. Napping was proved to be the solution to problems of alertness
during the day. (Dinges and Broughton).

Along with commuting affecting the environment and the public’s health, it is also affecting
the health of the commuter as well. Commuting has an effect on the commuter’s mental and physical
well-being. Figure 3 focuses on commuter mental health that measures the levels of sadness,
anger, stress, worry, and diagnosed depression within commuters by the amount of time spent on
traveling (Life Inc.). This is measured by surveying 100 commuters around America, asking
them if they experience any of these attributes while commuting. We see a significant amount of
people (about half) that go through stress, followed by anger and worry, and there are some that
do experience sadness and have been diagnosed with depression. There is also an increase of
these attribute levels as the amount of time commuting increases, from commuting 15 minutes or
less to 60 minutes or more.

Figure 3:
In Figure 4, physical health is measured, such as blood pressure, cholesterol, diabetes, amount of heart attacks, asthma, and cancer among commuters (Life Inc.). This study was measured within a group of 25 commuters, and there is a very significant amount that experience high blood pressure and high cholesterol from commuting (about 80%). Approximately 40% experience asthma, 20% are diabetics, and very few experience heart attacks and develop cancer, but all are possible from commuting.
All these problems that commuters face – lack of rest, comfort, money, endangering the environment, public, and their own health – is an issue that schools and universities must bring attention to. The best way to solve this problem is to reduce vehicle use, and in order to do that for commuters, there must be some sort of resting stop or lounge that they can attend to in between classes and/or during breaks. If there is a place designated for commuters to rest in and compile everything they need to get through the day, then the amount of car use will decrease, along with money spent, gas wasted, and health risks.

**University Approach: Models of What Other Universities Have**

Most colleges and universities offer the standard lounge area for their students to relax and study. This area usually consists of a spacious room with numerous sofas, chairs, and tables to provide a place to study. As noted before, Rutgers does offer a lounge, but not sufficient to commuter needs. There have been several different approaches by universities on how to fulfill commuter’s sleeping needs.

**Exclusivity**

Rutgers does have a so called ‘Commuter Lounge’ but it is not specifically for commuters. Anyone is allowed to go in and out of the building and use the facility. For example, the Douglass Campus Center’s second floor has an area that is called the ‘Commuter Center’ but people travel through that building all the time. There are people of all ages, from children to adults, who use this facility. It is not an exclusive area for commuters only. The way Stony Brook University approached that problem, was making an exclusive facility called ‘The Commuter Commons’ where commuters have to swipe their ID to enter the lounge (Stony Brook University). This completely wipes out the chance of anyone else getting into the facility and commuters have a place that would be especially designated for them. This would help rule out the resident advantage over commuters.

**Proper Environment**

In order to have a potentially ‘good nap’ a room must be quiet and relaxing. It is hard to get sleep when there is a lot of noise and commotion. To help fix this problem, Miami University in Ohio, designed an allocated area for students who drive to school to sleep and lounge in (Ohio State University). Since it is a part of their commuter center where they provide many different services, they separated it from all the other rooms as a quiet room designed as a sleeping area.

**Other approaches**

There are also other ways that universities have taken to fulfill the needs of their commuters. At Mt. Hood Community College, they provide sleeping and shower facilities for commuting students who travel long distances. This hostel provides twelve bunks for women and twelve for men with shower facilities for each, and encourages commuters to use this facility than using their lounges or cars for napping. (Educational Facilities Lab 50). Kent State University took a different approach where they reserve four residence hall rooms for commuters or provide motel
accommodations if the hall rooms are not available (Hamcke 118). During exam periods, the University of Maryland provides a sleeping lodge for commuters during exam periods that can accommodate up to forty-five people. There is no additional charge, but pre-registration is required. (Educational Facilities Lab 51). Obviously, these different approaches would be very costly for Rutgers, considering it is a large university with a lot of commuting students.

**Business Approach**

(KS)
Universities are not the only ones taking the initiative to install sleeping areas. Places of work, like hospitals and businesses are also beginning to take on this approach. MetroNaps offers “fatigue mitigation” services for companies big and small, including sleep assessments (testing and interviews to determine if employees are sleep-deprived and how that may be affecting their work) and the installation of futuristic bed-chairs called EnergyPods. Company headquarters also have a quiet retreat in the Empire State Building for clients to sleep during the day (Bechdel).

Many companies have found it useful to replace their coffee breaks with nap breaks as a way for employees to be more productive. On the 22nd floor of the Empire State Building, there is a nap center filled with about eight EnergyPods. This center provides dim lighting and a comfortable temperature for patrons to relax in. Big corporations like have come to realize that letting their employees take twenty minute naps will help to improve their efficiency at work and increase performance. MetroNaps clients currently include Google, Procter & Gamble, Cisco, PriceWaterhouseCoopers, Stanford VA Hospital and Providence Health Care.

**Proposal: Rutgers University’s Own Exclusive Commuter Lounge**

**Plan**

The goal of this proposal is to install a resting center, designated only for commuters, within all of the student centers at Rutgers University, New Brunswick. However, implementing this plan is a tremendous initial step. Thus, a plan to start only in one of the student centers, the Douglass Campus Center (DCC), will suffice as a model for the other campuses.

An online petition was made to see how many people are interested and would like to have such a facility on campus. Here is a link to that petition: http://www.change.org/petitions/ru-commuter-lounge-at-douglass-campus-center-create-an-exclusive-commuter-lounge

We also submitted a letter to Susan Romano, the Assistant Director of Student Involvement and Student Life, and Jovelle Tamayo, the Editor-in-Chief of the Daily Targum, to further advertise our business approach.

**Room**

The plan is quite simple. To start it off, all we need is a room filled with chair beds, numerous outlets to charge dying laptops and cell phones, tables, and an ID reader. The DCC already has a room called the ‘Commuter Center’ on the 2nd floor, but is open to all people. Installing an ID reader, one that will only take in those registered as a commuter, before the entrance of the room
will increase availability of resources for commuters. They will have better privacy and more access to a chair/bed/table/outlet that one may like to use during his/her break. There is already couches, chairs, tables, and outlets in that room, but it is probably best to buy chair beds, which are available for an affordable price at Ikea.

In order for people to partake in a comfortable nap, you need a comfortable bed. Chair beds are lounge chairs that easily convert into beds. The chair beds are not space consuming and easy to move around as they are also on wheels. You have the choice to either keep it folded as a cushioned chair needed for either to study or relax, or have it laid out as a bed to take a quick nap.

The room will need to be monitored to see that students do not take advantage of these chair beds and use the allocated time they are allowed. The maximum amount we will provide is forty minutes, since studies have shown that is the sufficient time for a nap. We are aiming to have around forty chair beds in the room, hiring two people that will be needed for this job (to monitor twenty beds each). The room will need some maintenance as the covers will need to be washed once a week. This will be maintained by one of the custodial staff members at the DCC as an extra task to their job list.

The hired staff can also maintain the peace and quiet needed within this facility for those who are napping and trying to study. Unlike the lounge at the DCC, there will be no piano present which contributes to the inconsiderate racket that students make within that room. The room should also have a wide range of outlets available for many students use laptops and their cell phones during the day. There are students that actually go inside their car to charge their electronics, which is also a waste of gas, and a hazard to our environment. Therefore, outlets are much needed within this facility we are trying to create,

To save money, there are commuters who also like to bring in food packaged from home. There really isn’t a place to heat up packaged foods at the dining area where all students eat. If possible, a small kitchen would be lovely to have within the Commuter Center as well. The kitchen shall have a refrigerator to store perishable foods and also have a microwave to heat them up.
Exclusiveness

Just like how the gyms here at Rutgers require students to use their RUID to enter the facility, that is exactly how this Commuter Lounge will be. Therefore, only those registered as an off-campus student or commuter will have access. Commuters will no longer have to compete for resources (outlets, chairs, tables, etc.) within the lounge by non-commuters, whom have the opportunity to rest and eat at their own place nearby campus. The exclusivity will help students use this facility more than the public lounges already on campus, making it easier for them to gather their things together without the hassle of being involved with on-campus students.
Works Cited


Kathlyn Santos  
April 4, 2012

Jovelle Tamayo  
Editor-in-Chief, Targum Editorial Office  
The Daily Targum  
26 Mine Street  /New Brunswick, NJ 08901

Dear Ms. Tamayo,

Rutgers University has a huge population of off-campus and commuting students, in which I also fall within. I feel that barely anyone understands the hardships that we go through when it comes to commuting to and from school. The gas spent to do our routinely commutes consume a lot of our money, along with damaging the public environment through the gas fumes we let out through our cars when stuck in traffic. I believe that Rutgers University should have a commuter lounge on campus, preferably Cook/Douglass campus, to help commuting students save money, gas, and keep the environment clean.

I am aware that there already is a “Commuter Lounge” at the Douglass Campus Center, but that isn’t designated for strictly commuters. Anyone is allowed in, leaving us actual commuters restricted to the resources that it gives us (chairs, couches, tables, outlet plugs). There should be a commuter lounge that is exclusive only for commuters which will give us the access to be able to rest undisturbed in between classes, eat, and study, instead of having to either waste gas and time going home, or even having to sleep in our cars.

I have made a proposal to make this commuter lounge possible which discusses the convenience and benefits that commuting and off-campus students will experience. My research also shows that commuters do damage the environment by polluting our air which is also another problem that I would like to solve. I believe this Commuter Lounge that I am willing to develop is going to make a deep impact on Rutgers University, along with the Off-Campus Housing Service (OCHS).

I thank you in advance for your consideration. Should you have any questions or comments in regards to the proposal, please do not hesitate to contact me electronically at ksantos1@eden.rutgers.edu or by phone at (551) 358-4181.

Sincerely,

Kathlyn Santos
Dear Mr. Harrison,

I would foremost like to send you my best regards for attending my presentation concerning the need for a Commuter’s Lounge at Rutgers University. Enclosed you will find my final proposal, filled with additional details as to why my problem is a concern and is feasible.

Rutgers University has a huge population of commuting students. One of the things that commuters need is a facility specifically catered to their needs. A lot of commuters are tired just from driving to school that when they get to class, they start to doze off. They need a quiet place to take naps and study, while also being able to heat their food up and charge their electronic devices. Since there is not really a place specifically catered to commuter needs, they end up going home, which further adds to the carbon emission problem. Rutgers lacks a place to relax without noises and distractions for its commuting students. This hinders attentiveness and creativity for these students, as napping is proved to improve. Fortunately, a plan to implement such a facility could help solve this problem.

My proposal discusses the convenience and benefits a commuter lounge can bring into our Rutgers Commuter Life program. The goal of the proposal is to ensure that commuter’s have a private facility for themselves to re-energize throughout the day.

I thank you in advance for your consideration. Should you have any questions or comments in regards to the proposal please do not hesitate to contact me electronically at hlato@eden.rutgers.edu or by phone at 732-979-7872.

Sincerely,

Halaiene Lato