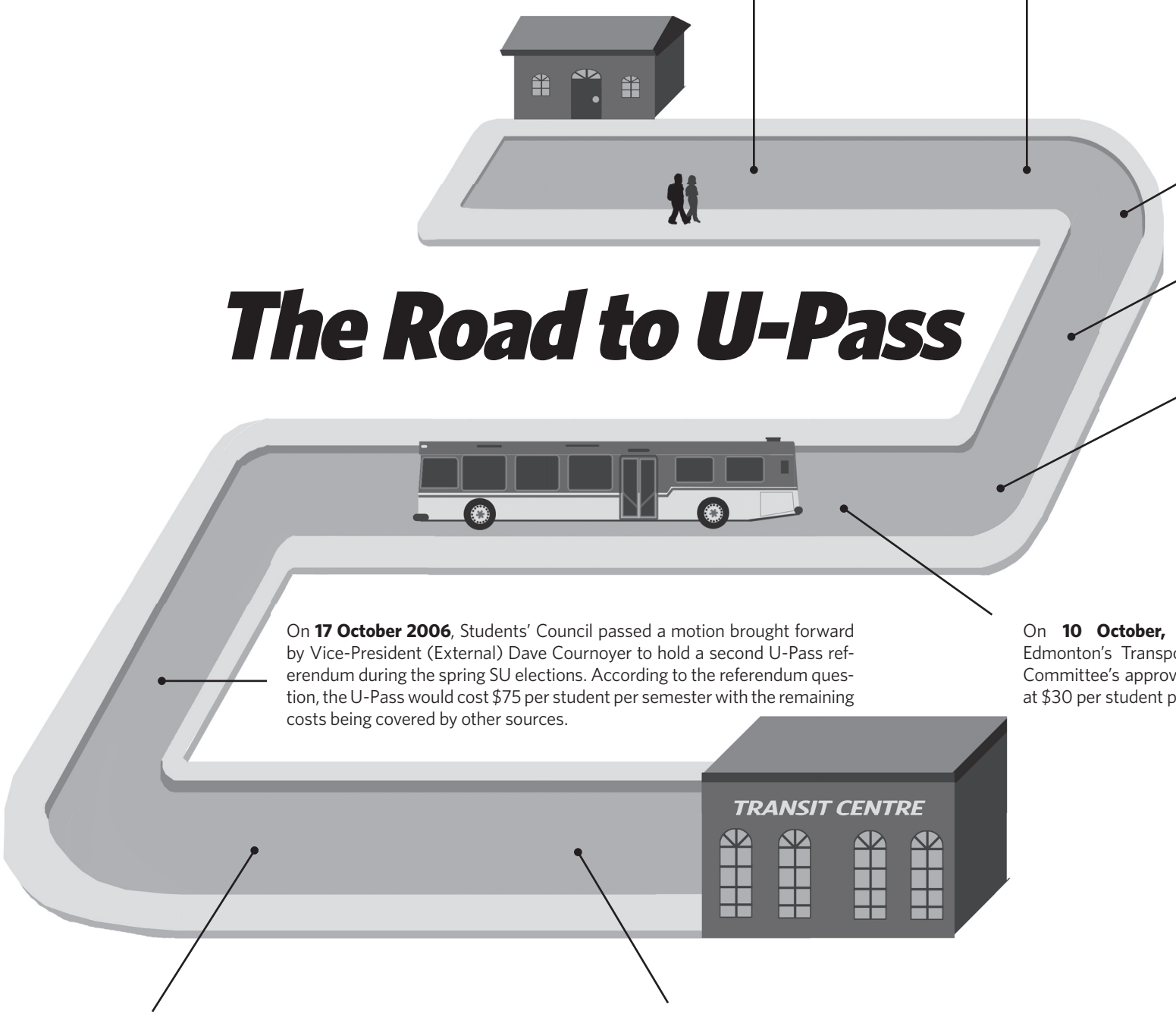
On 7 & 8 March undergraduate students can vote for or against the implementation of a Universal Transit Pass (U-Pass). If approved, starting September 2007, the U-Pass would give undergraduate students unlimited access to Edmonton, St Albert and Strathcona County's regular transit services for a mandatory fee of $75 per student, per term.

The Road to U-Pass



The University of Alberta Students' Union has been talking about a U-Pass, since 1998. But, it wasn't until **21 October, 2003** that then-Arts councillor Heather Wallace and then-Science councillor Shawna Pandya put forward a motion in Students' Council to draft a referendum question asking students if they would be willing to pay a mandatory fee for a U-Pass.

In **March 2004**, 63 per cent of student voters approved the U-Pass referendum at a maximum fee of $60 per student, per semester. However, the Edmonton Transit System (ETS) said that it would need a minimum of $120 per student, per semester in order to implement the U-Pass at break-even rate. The SU was left trying to find outside financial support to fill the funding gap.

In **July 2005**, Edmonton City Councillor Kim Krushell and Lorna Stewart from ETS made a presentation to Students' Council reiterating why $120 per student, per term was needed to offset the operating costs of the program. However, Krushell stressed at the time that the City of Edmonton didn't expect students to shoulder the whole cost. She said that the City would help the SU find other sources of funding for the program—including approaching the University Administration.

In **September 2005**, Grant MacEwan College student representatives came on board and joined U-Pass negotiations.

On **18 September, 2006**, St Albert City Council announced they would commit to subsidizing a U-Pass at $90 per student, per term.

On **10 October, 2006**, the City of Edmonton's Transport and Public Works Committee's approved funding the U-Pass at $30 per student per term.

On **17 October 2006**, Students' Council passed a motion brought forward by Vice-President (External) Dave Cournoyer to hold a second U-Pass referendum during the spring SU elections. According to the referendum question, the U-Pass would cost $75 per student per semester with the remaining costs being covered by other sources.

In **November 2006**, final approval from City Council ensured a $1.7 million commitment in municipal funding for the U-Pass. Strathcona County was then the only district left to outline its commitment to the U-Pass, which would give undergraduate and graduate students at the University of Alberta and Grant MacEwan College unlimited access to transit within the three city districts.

In **February 2007**, Strathcona County Council becomes the last of the three municipalities to approve funding the U-Pass at $30 per student per term. On **16 February, 2007**, 83 per cent of graduate students approved a mandatory U-Pass fee totalling $75 per student per term to begin September 2007.

NATALIE CLIMENHAGA
Senior News Editor

Current Vice-President (External) Dave Cournoyer is running the Yes side of the U-Pass referendum.

1 What makes the U-Pass an attractive option for students?

I think affordability is the key. At $75 a semester, the U-Pass breaks down to $18.75 a month—which equals one round trip a week—for unlimited access to regular service provided by Edmonton Transit, St Albert Transit and Strathcona County Transit. So, it's a really good deal for students and it provides an opportunity for students to take advantage of affordable alternative transit in getting to campus and around the city.

2 Why should students who don't currently use public transit support this referendum?

The affordability factor equals one round trip a week for four months with the $75 a term. So for example, if you're on campus and you want to take the bus down to Whyte Ave or take the LRT downtown and come back, that's basically what the cost of the U-Pass costs for unlimited access. So it really is affordable and provides an alternative for people if you don't want to drive. I know, like myself as someone who's in residence, I live in East Campus Village and I don't have a car and I'm in walking distance of all my classes, but just having the opportunity to have an affordable bus pass like that is huge.

3 Why do you think no one is running the No side of the referendum?

Because it's a good deal and everybody would like to vote Yes.

4 How will implementing the U-Pass help address transit issues on campus?

The U-Pass is part of the University's greater Traffic Demand Management strategy in order to alleviate a lot of the traffic congestion on campus. So for people who do drive cars to campus, it will alleviate the pressure on the roads with more students taking public transit and it will [make it] easier to find parking spaces. But it will cut down on the traffic congestion as well as it will address a lot of environmental issues with pollution.

5 You have five minutes to write a haiku on why students should vote Yes on the U-Pass referendum?

75 bucks
The U-Pass is a great deal
Vote Yes to U-Pass

KIM SMITH