

THE GATEWAY

volume XCVIII number 3 ♦ the official student newspaper at the university of alberta ♦ www.thegatewayonline.ca ♦ tuesday, 11 september, 2007

Deferred maintenance costs still adding up

After racking up over \$650 million in maintenance costs, the University of Alberta will finally see some relief from the province

NATALIE CLIMENHAGA
Senior News Editor

The University of Alberta is the oldest and largest postsecondary institution in the province—a distinction that comes with a high cost.

The University currently has \$656 million in deferred maintenance costs—by far the largest tab in the province—and U of A Vice-President (Facilities and Operations) Don Hickey noted that that figure is likely understated.

“We think it’s actually higher than that, given the inflation costs that have been going on, and some things aren’t tracked in deferred maintenance by government, which would increase the need for dollars,” Hickey said.

On 22 August, the Alberta government announced it would invest \$350 million towards the maintenance of over 100 schools, hospitals, postsecondary facilities, and local governments. Of this unbudgeted funding, \$111 million has been earmarked for the Ministry of Advanced Education to cover major system upgrades.

The University still hasn’t heard confirmation of how much of the funding they will be receiving, but Hickey said it’s estimated to be in the range of \$40–50 million.

“Obviously the amount we’re going to get won’t cover all the priorities, so we have to work with [the provincial government] to see which ones can be covered off,” Hickey said.

U of A Students’ Union Vice-



KRYSTINA SULATYCKI

PUTREFYING POSTSECONDARY As the U of A’s maintenance fees continue to rise, the government’s current response may not address the issues adequately.

President (External) Steven Dollansky noted that a significant portion of the buildings on campus were built before 1960, before the University of Calgary even opened its doors.

“Therefore, all these aging facilities need additional money and upkeep, and that’s not reflected in the operating funding,” Dollansky explained. “If you look at our deferred maintenance

bill, it’s over half of the [system-wide] total.”

Dollansky added that while the forthcoming funding from the provincial government will go towards alleviating pressures on critical building systems, it won’t eliminate the need for increasing future endowments.

“This funding will essentially slow

the Tory building’s slide into the river bank—it’s not going to stop it. We’re going to need significantly more funding before we see the problem go away,” Dollansky said. “This is just a drop in the bucket, but it’s an essential drop in the bucket that can go towards critical safety concerns, and that is appreciated.”

The provincial government’s

annual report, *Measuring Up*, has reported that 90 per cent of postsecondary institutions in the province are in “good or fair physical condition.”

However, Maurice Tougas, Alberta Liberal shadow critic for postsecondary education, questioned the relevance of the statistic.

PLEASE SEE **MAINTENANCE** ♦ PAGE 2

Initial U-pass reactions primarily positive

JENNIFER HUYGEN
News Staff

Initial feedback is positive after the implementation of the Universal Transit Pass (U-Pass) came into effect on 1 September at the University of Alberta and Grant MacEwan campuses.

As tens of thousands of students started classes last week for the fall semester, Edmonton Transit System (ETS) and the U of A sat on the edge of their seats in anticipation of how U-Pass ridership would fare initially. And ETS even apologized pre-emptively for problems accommodating the increased numbers.

However, according to Don Hickey, Vice-President (Facilities and Operations), student response has been very supportive.

“We’re very pleased with the uptake [and] attitude of the students, [which has] been of a very positive nature in which they’re embracing the U-Pass

and the benefits it’s going to give them.”

Fourth-year Arts student Corinna Chow echoed Hickey’s sentiments, describing the U-Pass as a convenient alternative to the previous system.

“I think it’s very handy, and it’s much cheaper than [paying] \$54 a month,” Chow said.

U of A students currently pay \$75 per term in fees for the U-Pass. It was approved by an 84 per cent of vote of students during of students the undergraduate referendum held on the issue last March, and 83 per cent during the graduate students’ referendum last February.

According to Students’ Union VP (External) Steven Dollansky, the implementation has been a huge success.

“We have distributed in excess of 26 000 stickers at this point,” Dollansky said via email. “Surprisingly, nearly 8500 stickers were handed out before September first. As a result, the mass

distribution centers have been able to distribute the remaining stickers with minimal wait times.”

Mass distribution sites were set up by the One Card office around campus last week. After 7 September, stickers became available at Infolink booths in SUB, HUB, ETLC, and CAB.

Despite the positive feedback, numerous concerns were voiced in the weeks preceding the start of classes as to how ETS would be able to handle the anticipated influx of transit users. As stated by Patricia Dickson, spokesperson for ETS, detailed measures have been put into place to facilitate the anticipated increase in ridership, including increased frequency of service and the addition of new routes.

“We have a comprehensive plan [...] to address the anticipated increase in [transit] service required by postsecondary students,” Dickson explained.

PLEASE SEE **U-PASS** ♦ PAGE 4



PHOTO ILLUSTRATION: ZHENDONGLI

DON'T CELL YOURSELF SHORT Current cellular phone networks and blanket Wi-Fi coverage aren’t all that great, say University researchers. Story on page 4.

Inside

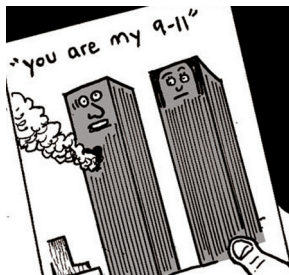
News	1-5
Opinion	7-11
Feature	12-13
Sports	14-17
A&E	18-22
Comics	23
Classifieds	24



Comics on the 'Net ...

Ramin Ostad and Mike Smith travelled to Seattle to take in PAX, one of the largest gatherings of geeks on the planet.

FEATURE, PAGES 12-13



... and in the paper

Mike Winters makes his return to the Gateway the only way he knows how: by offending our entire readership.

COMICS, PAGE 23