Parking options limited
Increasing enrollment levels cut down on space, new ramp possibilities expensive

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Finding a parking spot on campus is a daily struggle for many MSU students. However, with a growing student population and the current budget crisis hanging over the university, the situation is likely to get worse before it improves.

There are 5,400 on-campus parking stalls available at MSU and more than 14,500 students. Though 3,200 students call on-campus housing home, according to a recent KEYC-TV report, a portion of those students will eventually move off-campus, creating an even bigger strain on parking, a prospect that may pose problems for the university in the future.

“It’s going to get pretty tight around here, especially if we see continued enrollment levels like this year,” said Minnesota State Student Association (MSSA) President Tom Williams. “It’s only going to get worse as higher numbers of freshman start to move off campus. As a university as a whole, we don’t have enough parking available for all students.”

The prospect of even more crowded lots has some students calling for action to fix the potential parking gridlock.

“[The administration] needs to realize that every year the student body, as a mass, as a whole, has gotten bigger, and they have done nothing about parking,” said Tom Roys, a fourth-year student. “They need to realize that with the increasing number of commuting students, they need to accommodate us, especially when we are paying good money to attend this school.”

Though commuting students like Roys would like to see on-campus parking expanded, doing so is much
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easier said than done.

“It costs money. Hundreds of thousands of dollars,” said Facilities Services Manager David Cowan. “You’d have to set aside an enormous amount of money to do it right.”

One possibility to expand parking in the future involves the construction of ramps on existing lots. However, building a 500-stall ramp would cost an estimated $7.5 million and would displace parking spots during construction, according to Cowan.

The Facilities Services Department, which regulates and organizes campus parking, has a budget of $1.4 million for the 2010-2011 academic year, 59 percent of which comes from parking fees. None of the department’s funding comes from student fees or state assistance.

The quickest way to raise money to improve parking at MSU is for students to buy parking permits, according to Cowan.

Permits range in cost from a $96 orange permit to a $236 gold permit for off-campus students. Prices depend on the lot’s proximity to the center of campus.

Some students, who have already felt the impact of higher student fees this year, are hesitant to pay for parking privileges.

“Paying for parking is very expensive,” said Mike Euerle, a senior. “With the rising tuition costs it is hard for me to pay for that on top of everything else.”

Students who feel they cannot afford the cost of a parking permit have the option of parking for free in Lots 23 North and 23 South, which are located just west of Monks Avenue. There are a total of 431 stalls in the free lots.

Though the free lots are at capacity the majority of the time, it could be worse.

“Compared to other universities, the parking we have here is considered a luxury,” said MSSA Vice President Brett Anderson. “Try going to the U of M; parking there is a real headache. They don’t have any free parking.”

Though it may be most convenient for students to drive to class, other options do exist. Students may purchase a bus pass for as low as $45 a semester or a 30-day pass for $16. U-Zone bus routes, which extended down to Timberwolf Drive in order to accommodate the new College Town apartments, offer students an inexpensive alternative to driving.

On-campus parking is an issue that will need to be addressed in the future. However, MSU’s budget problems and the poor economy have forced the university administration and the MSSA to spend its money wisely.

“It’s a priority,” said Anderson, “but I would rather have professors teaching our classes than expanded parking.”