

# UNM Campus Needs To Graduate Beyond Cars

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On any given day, nearly 50,000 people make their way to the University of New Mexico. They come to teach, to learn, to work, to play and to get medical attention. On any given day, UNM's main campus in Albuquerque becomes the fifth largest city in New Mexico.

That's quite a transformation from 1889 when UNM occupied one lonely building on a desolate mesa miles from Downtown Albuquerque. During the past 120 years, UNM has evolved into a major urban university dedicated to its missions of teaching, research, public service and patient care. Meanwhile, Albuquerque too has grown, effectively locking UNM into the urban core of the city.

Therein lies the challenge in developing a plan for the University's future — how to accommodate growth and change while maintaining UNM's unique character and sense of place AND mitigating the impact of change on surrounding neighborhoods and businesses.

Much has changed in the 13 years since the last master plan was prepared for UNM. Who could have anticipated the growth of UNM Hospital and the Health Sciences, the impact of the Big I makeover, the completion of a regional mass transit system, the Rail Runner, or the opportunities presented by future campuses in Rio Rancho and at Mesa del Sol? The previous plans and the “current reality” form the foundation of what we do in the future, as we grapple with the additional concerns of regional growth, climate change, sustainability and constrained resources.

Planning is a dynamic process. We must incorporate plans already under way for the health sciences, athletics, parking, student life and information technology. We will continue to solicit input from UNM deans, faculty, staff, students and administrators through questionnaires, surveys and town halls. We are working with the Mid-Rio Grande Council of Governments (MRCOG), the city of Albuquerque and the New Mexico Department of Transportation because UNM cannot solve regional transportation issues alone. The opportunity for incorporating transit strategies to serve the UNM and CNM campuses could dramatically impact and reduce the amount of SOV (single occupancy vehicle) trips into the region as well as reduce the greenhouse gases that are generated by fossil fuel burning automobiles.

In literally dozens and dozens of meetings over the past 12 months, we've briefed elected officials and community leaders, talked to and listened to the concerns of UNM's neighbors, both residential and business. In addition, the UNM Campus Development Advisory Committee meets monthly to brief and get input from UNM's 12 surrounding neighborhoods. We've taken all of this input into consideration and will try to provide a balanced response.

UNM is a complex urban in-fill activity center, smack dab in the middle of our city. The biggest challenge will be to evolve from what is now a commuter campus to a sustainable urban campus by paying attention to the four D's of travel behavior: density, diversity of land use, design and destination. Providing more on-campus housing will correlate with creating a 24/7 campus with fewer SOV trips.

UNM students of the future — the Internet generation — will move faster, think faster and demand a 24/7 vitality of urban life that a commuter campus cannot provide. Current students already generate an incredible number of city bus trips per year as they struggle with the costs of operating and owning a vehicle. The master plan update looks to provide a more energetic campus life as well as a network of robust connections to surrounding businesses and activities.

Our goal will be to reduce vehicle use with greater bicycle, pedestrian and transit connections. Surface parking lots, which 30 years ago could accommodate all vehicles on campus, will continue to become the locations for future academic and health-care facilities. By capping central campus parking and pricing it appropriately, parking garages will be provided to replace surface lots, as inevitably some people will continue to drive to campus to learn, work, play and get medical aid.

As we finalize the master plan update for consideration by the UNM regents in the next few months, there are several goals to keep in mind. We must work with our government colleagues on this holistic approach to transportation. We will anticipate the need for increased capacity to accommodate the growing needs for education, research and patient care. We will integrate sustainability into all aspects of the campus. We will anticipate an expanded role for UNM as a primary contributor to the economic health of the state, and we will continue to listen to our neighbor's issues and mitigate their concerns as much as possible.

Last and most importantly, we will preserve the character and the unique sense of place that is UNM — accommodating growth and change for future generations of New Mexicans who will come to the university to learn, work, play, live and heal.

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