

"Test of Leadership"

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*Traffic, Transit
(and Editorial Climate)*

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Parking at MSU:

Test Of Leadership

THERE IS A little something for everyone in the results of a parking study conducted for Memphis State University by Harland Bartholomew & Associates, Inc. Memphis State was told it needed 1,200 to 1,600 additional parking spaces to reduce traffic congestion around the campus, and that more land would have to be taken from the surrounding neighborhood in order to live up to "university policy (which) favors development of parking in surface lots as opposed to parking structures." That satisfied those pushing a controversial parking expansion program unveiled last fall.

The study also announced that Memphis State could make do with considerably less additional space if more students used mass transit or shared rides, and if rising energy costs take more cars off the streets. It was suggested that a new bus route between the university and southeast Memphis be operated on a trial basis. That may have been calculated to satisfy the residential groups pressing school officials to stop the flow of asphalt into their neighborhoods.

If it appears that Memphis State's consultants have a talent for the obvious, that is because consultants usually report what their clients want to hear, and when the university retreated from advancing community criticism in September, it went looking for a way to have its cake and eat it, too.

Anyone could have figured out that Memphis State's thirst for parking could be satiated by more buses and fewer cars. But the question in this con-

troversy has been whether the university would adapt its fundamental development policy to the needs of the times or continue to pursue a policy that encourages everybody to drive an automobile to the campus.

FROM THE LOOK of this work, school officials are more inclined to pay lip service to transportation alternatives than to do anything which might actually encourage them. A single experimental bus route falls short of the old college try. And when officials propose "phasing in" new parking lots gradually while "monitoring" the growth of public transportation, they are double-talking the issue. Each additional parking space deters the growth of public transportation and builds their case, and they know it.

Memphis State has a traffic jam because it has 7,017 places to park. Is traffic to and from the school each morning and afternoon going to decrease if it provides 8,211 places to park, or are that many more cars going to converge on the area and join the competition?

We recognize that some will always need or want to drive and that accommodations are needed for them. But the test for Memphis State is whether it should continue its preoccupation with old solutions to old problems or whether its considerable resources should be used to help develop and demonstrate better urban transportation systems at a critical time. One is the business of a traffic engineer and the other is the business of a leading urban university.

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