SCHOOL
University of Rhode Island, public, 4-year, 15,000 students, Kingston, Rhode Island.

ABSTRACT
The purpose of this project was to facilitate the increase in availability and use of alternative transportation methods at the University of Rhode Island in order to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The project consisted of three main components: 1) Research - conducting surveys to measure knowledge and use of alternative transportation methods and to estimate greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from commuting, 2) Policy - developing and implementing a clean transportation policy which addresses both commuter travel and University fleet vehicles, and 3) Outreach - implementing an education and outreach campaign to increase awareness and promote use of alternative transportation, as well as inform the community about the University’s adoption of a clean transportation policy. The research is complete and GHG emissions from commuting have been estimated. A set of clean transportation policies has been drafted and submitted to the President’s Sustainability Council for incorporation into URI’s climate action plan. Outreach efforts included helping to develop commuter information pages on two websites, working with the student sustainability group to promote the use of public transit and carpooling, creating a “How to Ride the Bus”, and organizing a “Commuter Transportation Forum” on Earth Day. This project was supported through a NWF Campus Ecology Fellowship grant, 2008 Fellow Rachel Sholly.

GOALS AND OUTCOMES
Goals
Initially, the goal of this project was to measure commuting emissions before and after implementation of a clean transportation policy and an outreach campaign. A goal was set of a 2 percent GHG reductions by the end of the project. After it became clear that implementing a policy was going to take more time for political reasons, the primary goal became accurately measuring emissions from commuting and identifying transportation policies that would have the greatest impact on emissions. Rachel Sholly, the NWF Campus Ecology Fellow who initiated this project has graduated, she is currently employed at the university and plans to continue working with the President’s Sustainability Council to finalize, adopt, and implement a clean transportation policy in the next couple of years. Rachel also plans to continue the transportation surveys and GHG estimates by overseeing undergraduates. And, would ideally like to establish a self-sustaining mechanism for conducting annual transportation surveys.

Accomplishments and Outcomes
This project was successful in that baseline commuter emissions have been measured and process for measuring future changes had been established. No official policies were adopted during the project period, however, public transit was expanded due in part to advocacy efforts of this project. The clean transportation policy recommendations submitted to the Sustainability Council will be adopted in some form by September 15, 2009, our deadline to submit a climate action plan per the American College and University Presidents’ Climate Commitment.
The research portion of this project is part of an on-going study to baseline and monitor commuter behavior at URI. A series of commuter surveys were conducted to collect data, analyze trends and identify key variables related to commuter behavior, greenhouse gas emissions from commuting, and attitudes toward alternative transportation. Web-based surveys were conducted during each of the following semesters: Spring 2006, Summer 2006, Spring 2008, Summer 2008, Fall 2008 and Spring 2009. Survey design evolved with each repetition, but key questions remained the same to allow trends over time to be assessed. In the Fall 2008 and Spring 2009 surveys, additional questions were added to collect information from regular bus riders as well as students living on campus. Visual surveys of vehicle occupancy and vehicle type were conducted in Spring 2006, Fall 2008, and Spring 2009 and allowed comparison of observed and reported data.

Based on survey results, a set of transportation policies were drafted that aim to produce measurable reductions in greenhouse gas emissions. As a member of the President’s Council on Sustainability, Rachel worked to form a transportation subcommittee, which is in the process of finalizing a set of transportation policy recommendations to include in a comprehensive climate action plan. Throughout the project period, Rachel presented her research findings periodically and received feedback from the Council. She also advocated for increased public transit service, which was implemented in the Spring 2009 semester. Rachel will continue working with the administration during the summer to designate a permanent carpool parking lot, establish a park and ride in a neighborhood with a very high student population, and increase bus service.

Challenges and Responses
There were two major challenges during this project. The first was the complexity of the commuter surveys. Designing and distributing the surveys was relatively straightforward and quick. Analyzing the data and estimating GHG emissions was much more time consuming and complicated. Results, especially changes over time, did not always make sense. Rachel responded to this by working hard and simplifying the data analysis process where she could. Rachel says “if I could do it again, I might consider focusing only on the research portion for a short-term project and then tackling the policy and outreach components as a separate project.”

The second major challenge was policy adoption and implementation. While Rachel was able to submit the transportation policy recommendations to the President’s Sustainability Council, their timeline for adopting and implementing them was out of her control. Rachel responded to this challenge by working with the Council and transportation staff members as much as possible. For a future project, Rachel says “she would set goals so that they do not rely on decisions that are out of my control.” In other words, the goal would have been to develop and submit policy recommendations, rather than getting them adopted and implemented within the project period.

Commentary
Be realistic and conservative with the goals you set for yourself. Also, be aware of external parties or circumstances on which the success of your project depends. You may not want to base the success of your project on a certain outcome that is out of your control.

ENGAGEMENT AND SUPPORT
Leaders and Supporters
The project advisor, Dr. Frederick Meyerson, was especially helpful with the research component of this project. As an ecologist and demographer, he has the ideal combination of natural science, social science, and policy experience and interest. The fellowship project verifier, Lucas Lussier, URI’s transportation
manager, was also instrumental in this project. Mr. Lussier provided a wealth of information on existing transportation concerns, survey needs, and the implications of potential transportation policies.

Despite slowing the policy implementation process, the President’s Sustainability Council has been charged with fulfilling the requirements of the American College and University Presidents’ Climate Commitment and is, therefore, an appropriate audience with which to share my research results and policy recommendations. The Council has been supportive throughout the process.

In general, Rachel found that most staff, administrators and faculty support alternative transportation at URI and sustainability in general. It seems that most are just too busy to make it a priority, but if they are approached with a proposal they are likely to support it in whatever way they can.

**Funding and Resources**
The costs of this project were relatively low. Rachel received a NWF Campus Ecology Fellowship grant to support this project and support also from the URI Transportation Center (URITC). URITC funds were used for time spent on the research portion of the project, advertising and refreshments for the transportation forum, and conference travel. NWF funds were used for printing and conference travel.

**Community Outreach and Education**
In order to inform the campus community about the research and to increase awareness of commuter transportation issues and opportunities, Rachel organized an Earth Day forum that featured three presentations. She presented the commuter behavior research, a communications professor discussed the stages of behavior change in the context of transportation, and a planner from the Rhode Island Public Transportation Authority discussed the progress that has been made in providing transit service to URI over the years. Two undergraduate students reported the success of their project to organize a trial of a designated carpool parking lot. The presentations were followed by a lively discussion challenges and opportunities facing commuter transportation at URI. Because students, staff and faculty were each present, many perspectives and unique ideas were shared.

In the Fall 2008 semester, Rachel helped an Honors class to develop a commuter information page for a URI sustainability website. Here students, staff, and faculty can find bus routes, carpool matches and information on how to ride the bus. She also worked with a graduate student who developed the transportation section of a “URI Green Pages” website that attempts to connect all things sustainable at URI – from research to curricula to university initiatives. In Spring 2009, Rachel worked with the student environmental group to promote the use of public transit and carpooling at URI’s Earth Day celebration. Finally, she also created a “How to Ride the Bus” pamphlet that describes all the details about buying a bus pass, schedules and routes, and answers frequently asked questions.

The local community will benefit from a clean transportation policy as it will reduce traffic congestion and improve air quality. Although the local community was not a target for outreach efforts, a couple community members were present at the transportation forum. To help spread this research to other campuses, Rachel presented a poster at the Smart and Sustainable Campuses Conferences organized by the National Association for College and University Business Officers held at the University of Maryland.

**Campus Climate Action: Your School’s Carbon Footprint**
This project directly addressed climate change by measuring GHG emissions and monitoring commuter behavior patterns, developing policy recommendations to reduce emissions from transportation, and promoted the use of alternative transportation on campus.
National Wildlife Federation’s Campus Ecology Program

The Campus Ecology Fellowship provided support and structure that ensured the success of this project. Being able to meet and regularly talk with other Fellows who were working on similar projects and encountering similar projects was very helpful. Having regular assignments and deadlines ensured that I kept track of everything that was done. The NWF staff was also very helpful in providing training, advice and encouragement. ~ Rachel Sholly, 2008 NWF Campus Ecology Fellow

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Campus Sustainability History

In 2007, President Carothers became a signatory of the American College and University Presidents’ Climate Commitment and established the President’s Council on Sustainability to recommend steps to fulfilling the Commitment. Shortly after the Council began meeting, an oceanography professor conducted a carbon footprint analysis for URI. The University has also hired an energy service company to audit and retrofit buildings on all four campuses with more energy efficient technologies. A recent addition to URI’s curriculum has been a Sustainability Minor, for which there are a few required core classes and a wide variety of sustainability elective courses. Additionally, URI is in the process of creating a sustainability officer position.