Park it like It’s Hot, The heated Topic of transportation at Ole Miss.

With Ole Miss’s growing more and more every year, with just an incoming freshmen class of 3,809, it is no surprise Ole Miss’s parking is dwindling as we speak. With this in mind, we look at the current state and future of parking at Ole Miss and who is being affected.

In recent years, many public universities have decided to rule out parking for first-year students. Resident Hall One, a new resident hall was presented along with another resident hall in the works this almost looks promising. What other options do students have? With the stress and price of parking rising, our students at Ole Miss are finding new alternatives to get to campus. Fifth-year student, Edwin Edenfield is one of the many students who have been able to think outside of the box to finish his final year at Ole Miss “Throughout my five years, parking has been a nightmare. As soon as you find a good parking spot you get hit with an overpriced parking ticket. After this happening multiple times I figured taking the bus would be a better option for me but the wasn’t any better. It was never on time resulting me always being late for class. I decided I would live close to campus this year so I could walk.”

While good old fashion exercise is a great solution to the problems that arise from parking on a congested campus, others haven’t given up completely up on Parking Services yet. Third-year undergrad student, Morgan Oberhausen, explains her experience with Park and Ride. “I love Park and Ride because it runs every five minutes, and it drops me off right in front of the art department, helping me out if I’m ever late! That is so much better than parking in commuter and getting sweaty walking a mile to class since most of the commuter lots are nowhere near the buildings I go to. It was also a plus that the Park and Ride passes are cheaper than the Commuter passes”. Many students, in fact, do choose Park and Ride for it being more cost efficient. Commuter passes costed $150.00 for the 2015-2016 school year while Park and Ride priced at $75.00. The University of Georgia’s parking pass ($40.00 for nine months) cost $308.00, one of the most expensive in the SEC. With the University of Georgia’s student body being a population of 35,197; 12,694 more than the University of Mississippi’s student body, we as a university can help but wonder what the future hold for Ole Miss Parking. With ten different bus lines, Ole Miss partners with the city of Oxford to create Oxford – University Transit. Being free to students by showing a student i.d., costs for non-students are extremely cheap with adults paying $1.00, Elderly (65 with proof of age) $0.50, school age costing $0.75, and children under 38 inches being free.

For the 2015-2016 school year, Overflow residential parking became an option for students. This option is a parking lot where students could park if they were unable to find a space on campus. These students purchased the $150.00 commuter pass, and the Overflow parking lots were located a mile and half from the core of campus. “I will admit this decision was not meet with a lot of positive comments”. Mike Harris, director of Parking and Transportation, admitted. “We had to find a place to place residential students who brought vehicles and were not able to get a permit on main campus due to a one to one permit to space allotment. The only alternative would be to tell students they could not bring a vehicle. I understand we have students who depend on their vehicle to get home and need one with them. So we made the best decision we could in the only place we had to park them. We placed a 24/7 guard at the entrance, fenced the lot, and placed cameras there to make it as secure as possible. We also initiated a daily shuttle route Monday-Friday from 7am-7pm to transport the students back and forth between this lot and the residential area. We also have an on-call van service which operates from 7pm-7am Sunday night through Thursday night for transporting between the residential halls and the parking area. After 5:00 on Friday one may bring their vehicle on campus for the weekend. We are in the process bringing a residential parking garage to campus to make sure we have enough parking for our residential students going forward.”

Another alternative many students are resulting to are using bicycles as a means for of transportation. Currently the university makes the process very simple with only having to fill out Bicycle Registration Form. Starting July 1st, 2015, bicycle permits are free and valid for four years from the date issued, a recent change from the past $3.00 charge. Students provide their own locks for bike racks while Ole Miss’s Bike Shop offers great resources for getting your bicycle serviced at affordable prices. In 2014 Ole Miss even got an honorable mention for transforming in a Bicycle Friendly University from the League of American Bicyclists. Junior Ariyl Onstott explains even in the most bullet proof plans for transportation, new issues will arise. “On one hand, it’s quicker than taking the bus or parking in comuter spots that are practically in Narnia and a lot less magical. On the other hand, you feel like all the cars are angry at you for not going as fast as they are and that you might be run over at possibly any second. It’s a weird danger zone without the safety of walking or driving, but I love riding my bike on and off campus, and honestly wouldn’t have it any other way!”

In this tug of war between Ole Miss’s students and Parking and Transportation; how do the professors feel? Political Science professor, Marvin King, responded on how parking has affected his classrooms. “Parking is always an issue for the students. Sometimes I'm sympathetic, but sometimes, I'm a bit of a grumpy old scrooge when it comes to parking. When students come late to class for my 9:30am class and blame it on parking, I usually think it is because they waited too late to come to class and knew they were cutting it close from the beginning of the day. Besides, parking and traffic are big issues in any major city, where many of our students will end up working. Their boss really won't be interested in their excuses, they'll say that the Ole Miss grad is always late - not good. However, sometimes I am sympathetic. I think we should have more buses and more developed bus/biking/pedestrian lanes to discourage people driving on campus - that just makes traffic wore for everyone. It's not the students' fault we have instituted better mass transit. Long story short, when students come in late, I grouse, but I don't actually penalize them for it”. In many cases, some professors are even late to perform their jobs due to late of parking spots! “At the moment, I have no parking issues. I have a reserved spot at the RC South, so that really spoils me. It's extremely nice not to have to look for a spot, so I am very appreciative of that. Most faculty give me the eye roll (if they're polite) when they see it. I do have issues, especially on chapter night, with members of certain "groups" always trying to park in my spot - I usually have to put cones out if I have to leave on Monday nights”.

With so many different opinions and factors playing into this system, I couldn’t help but ask Mr. Harris what he believes the future of parking at Ole Miss looks like. “There are many moving parts at this time as we continue to construct and renovate buildings. Parking will look much different in the future. The residential area should have adequate parking once we get the garage constructed. The commuter area will continue to evolve as lots are constructed on the outer areas of campus. We will implement an inner campus shuttle route to help students’ faculty/staff and visitors get around campus. This loop will have a South Hub which is currently under construction at Kennon Observatory and a North Hub which will be at the new Union once it is constructed. We will also expand our Park-N-Ride area to include the Whirlpool lot and connect this area to campus via Hill Drive to the South Hub at Kennon Observatory. I will also add that all of these initiatives come at a price and will need to be funded through various means. However, I believe if we do not fund them and implement them that the cost will be greater in the future as we continue to expand and grow”.­­­­­