

The Price of Presence:

The Impact of Paid Parking on
Student Access at Bundoora
Campus

Acknowledgement of Country:

This report was written on the lands of the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin nations. RUSU pays its respect to Elders past and present and acknowledges that sovereignty of this land was never ceded.

CONTENTS

Background	4
Survey Results	7
Part 1: Student Transport Snapshot	8
Part 2: Parking and Transport	11
Part 3: Impact of Costs	16
Summary	23
Conclusion & Recommendations	27

Background

RUSU consults with and receives feedback from students via multiple pathways including student representatives, department events, during campaigning, through student contributions to Have Your Say Week and from the thousands of student who attend RUSU events, engage in our food security program and access our support services.

RUSU has received increasing feedback from Bundoora students that paid student parking in Bundoora is unreasonable and unaffordable. RUSU notes that the topic of paid parking became a key issue for Bundoora students in 2022, when students returned to campus on an ongoing basis after repeated covid-19 lockdowns and the cost-of-living crisis escalated. Whilst some of the wider cost of living pressures have eased in recent months, students and young people remain disproportionately impacted by the high costs of rent, food and health care.

The **ABS Selective Living Cost Measures** for March 2025 show a 3.5% annual increase in selective living costs for 'other government transfer recipient' households, which would include students on Austudy benefit. This is the highest annual increase in this cost of living measure compared to other house hold types (with an average 2.9% annual increase) and compared to the consumer price index at 2.5% annual increase (Selected Living Cost Indexes, Australia, March 2025 | Australian Bureau of Statistics). What is clear from these statistics is that students continue to experience increases in costs for basic expenses such as housing, food and healthcare in excess of the general population.

With growing pressures on their budgets, Bundoora students have been petitioning RUSU to advocate for free parking in Bundoora. Anecdotal experiences shared by students suggested that students were **going without** basic necessities to be able to pay for parking, were skipping parts of a class to reduce the amount they had to spend on parking or to prevent

a fine, or avoiding coming to campus altogether because of the cost involved in transport to and parking at campus.

This was of concern to RUSU for multiple reasons; students should be able to afford their **basic necessities** without having to sacrifice essentials just to attend university. We were also concerned that **attendance** was becoming a financial decision for some students, when attendance can be a determining factor in academic attainment. We have also heard anecdotally from students on other campuses that spending time at university saves them money as they reduce their costs relating to power, heating/cooling their homes, wifi etc. as well as providing them with opportunities to build community and connection with other students. Bundoora students who leave early or do not attend due to the costs associated with transport to and parking at Bundoora are not able to access these same benefits.

In order to get a clearer picture of the impact of paid parking on students in Bundoora, as well as the wider pressures of transport costs and the desire to stay on campus, RUSU decided to survey students in Bundoora on transport and campus life.

RUSU received **442 responses** to our survey which was open for a two-week period. The survey was advertised to students through posters and flyers at RUSU front counters, in our safe spaces and at RUSU events in Bundoora. This is a **significant response**, demonstrating that Bundoora students feel deeply about this topic, and sharing their thoughts and experiences of transport to campus, and campus life in Bundoora.



Giving out parking fines to students that pay so much money to study on a campus where public transport isn't easily accessible is exploitative. if student forget to pay for parking they should be charged a fixed daily rate (the cost of parking on campus for the operating hours)."

Survey Results

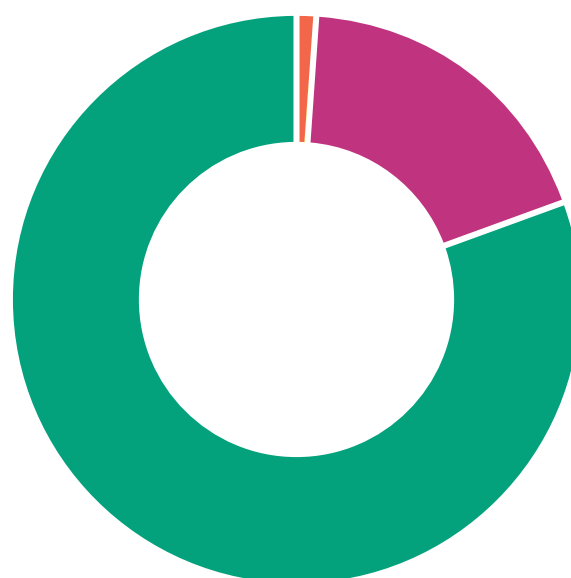
Part 1: Student Transport Snapshot

Our initial questions focused on where students study, to determine the volume of respondents who study at Bundoora, either as their only campus or alongside another RMIT Campus.

Q1. Are you a current RMIT student who studies on Bundoora Campus?

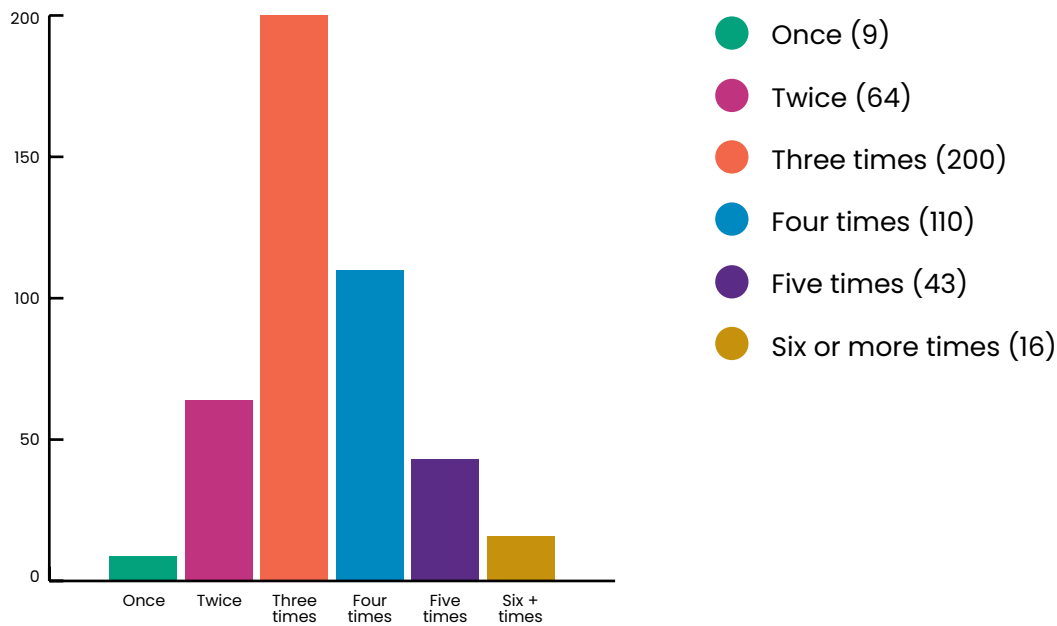
RUSU assessed the responses from the four respondents who indicated that they were not current students who study on Bundoora campus. Their responses indicate that all four travelled frequently to Bundoora campus and that they all commented on campus facilities. Two of the respondents included survey answers that indicate that they study or have recently studied at Bundoora campus. RUSU made the decision to retain these four responses as they demonstrated that the student respondents were frequent travellers to Bundoora campus and were knowledgeable about parking and facilities.

We also wanted to ascertain how frequently students were travelling to and from campus and how they travelled to give us a general overview of how most student get to Bundoora.

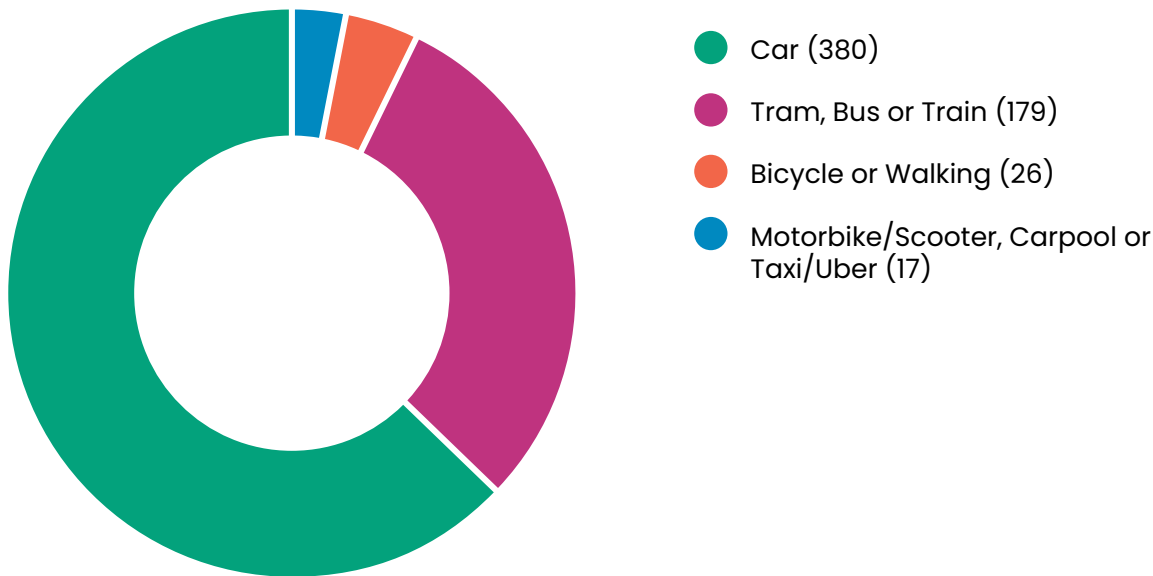


- Yes, I only study in Bundoora (357)
- Yes, I study in Bundoora and the City and/or Brunswick (81)
- No (4)

Q2. How many days a week (on average) do you travel to the Bundoora Campus?



Q3. How do you usually travel to Bundoora Campus?



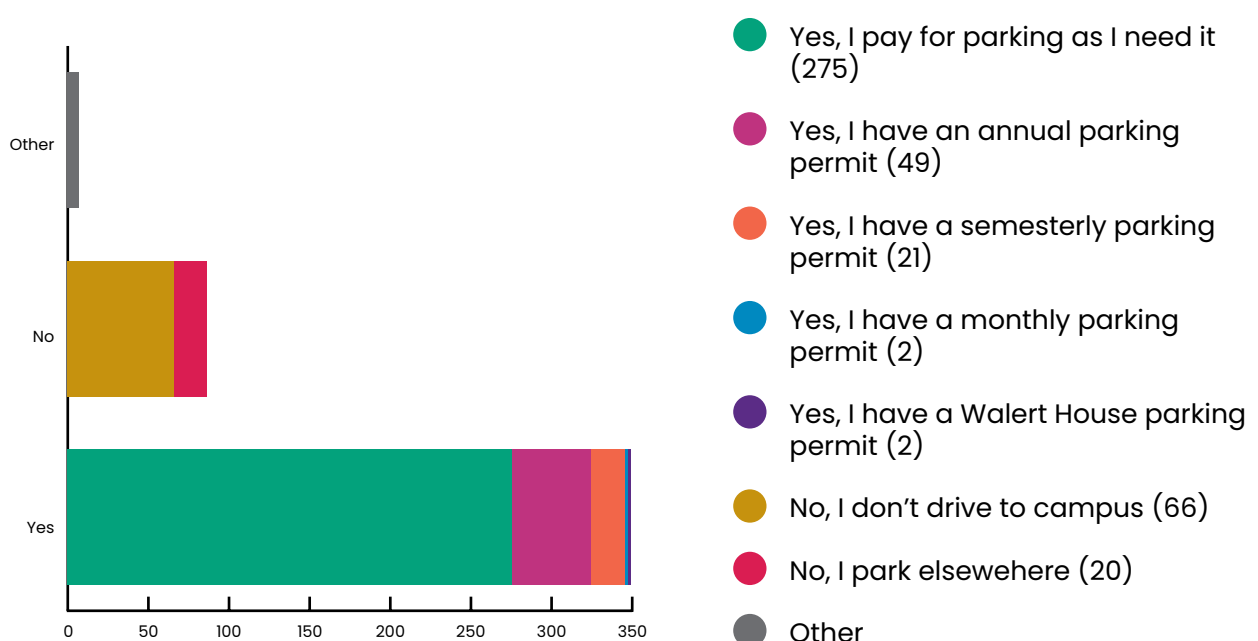


Is there any way that RMIT Bundoora can implement better transport from northern suburbs like Craigieburn to the Bundoora campus. I used to take public transport daily to RMIT and it would take me 2-3 hours to get to campus despite it only 20kms away. I had no choice to get my licence because of the burnout from travel."

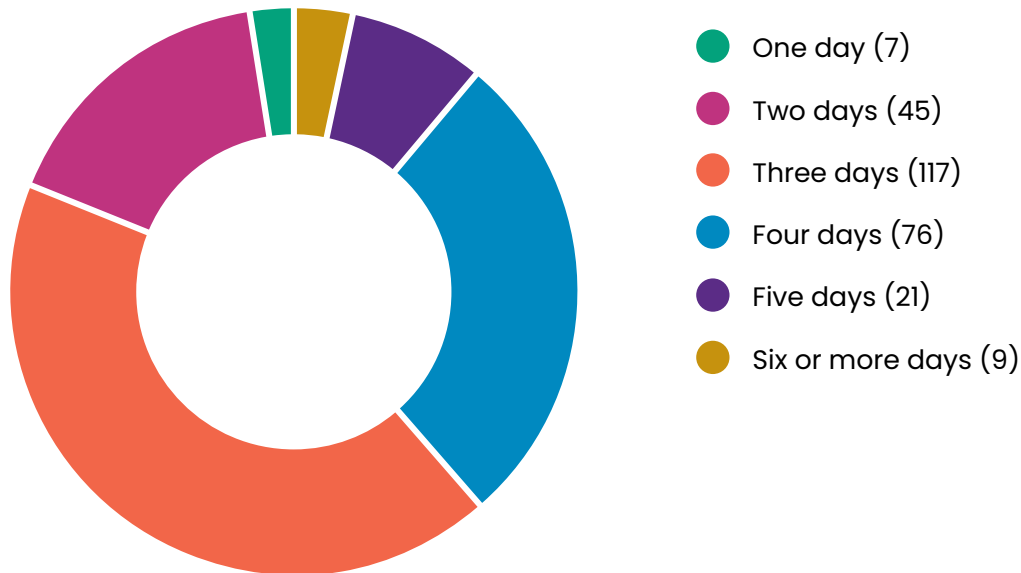
Part 2: Paying for Parking at and Transport to Bundoora

This section of questions was designed to explore costs involved in travelling to and parking at Bundoora. Please note that in this section the only costs we explore with regards to driving to campus is parking. Later in the survey students who drive also talk about the need to factor in the costs of fuel, tolls and car maintenance into the cost of travelling to Bundoora.

Q4. Do you pay for parking at Bundoora Campus?

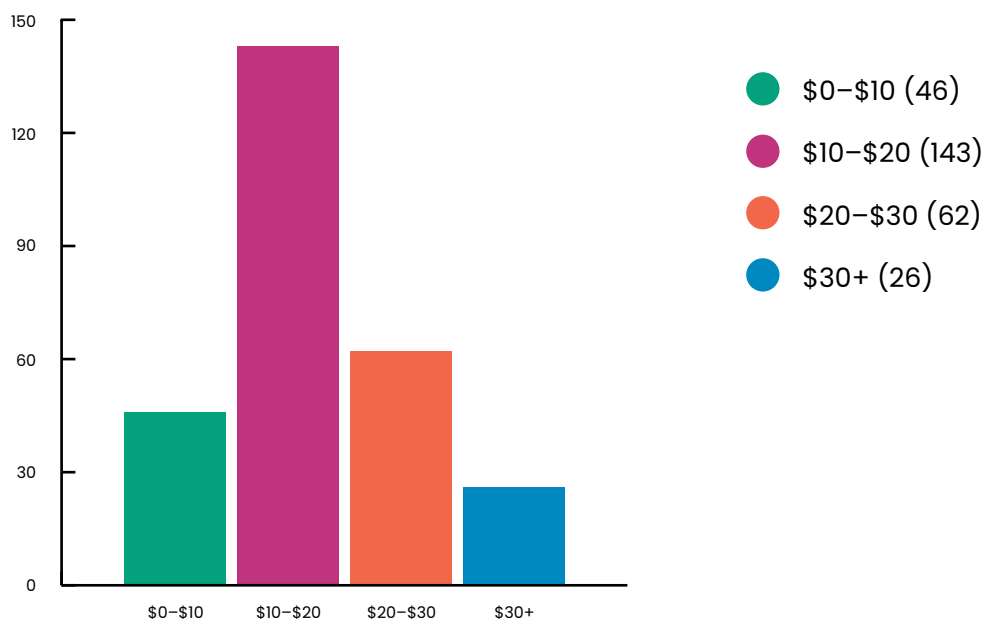


The vast majority of students who drive to campus pay for parking as they need it. Of the 275 students who stated that they pay for parking when they need it the breakdown of how many days they spend on campus is as follows:



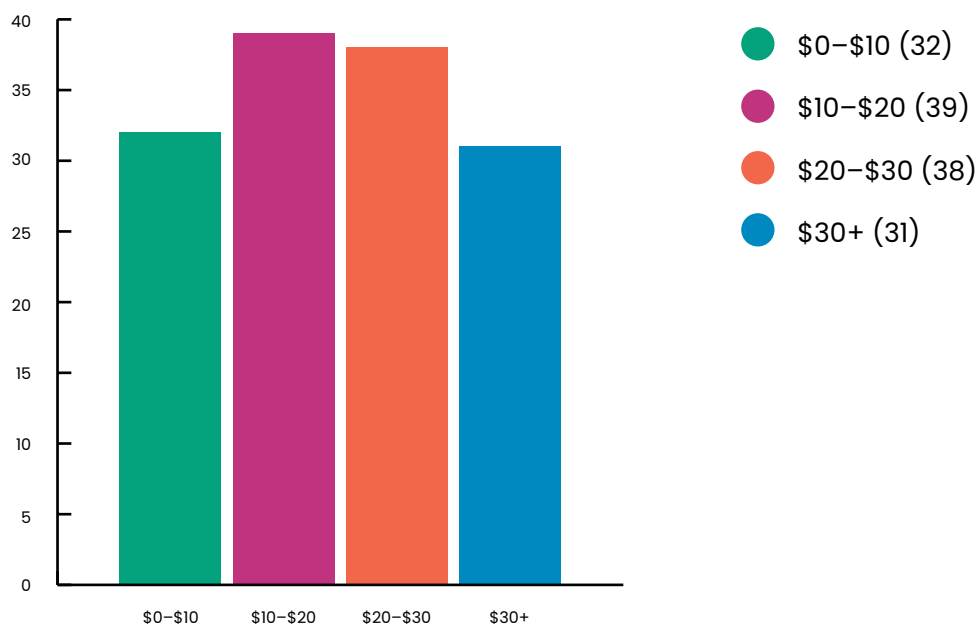
This suggests that there are students who travel to Bundoora campus frequently enough to benefit long term from using a parking permit but they still choose to pay as they go. Possible reasons for this could be a lack of awareness of parking permits or that the initial outlay of parking permits is prohibitive for these students to access. We know that students are still struggling with the cost of everyday items and semesterly or yearly parking permits may be prohibitively priced.

Q5. How much do you pay for on campus parking per week (on average)?



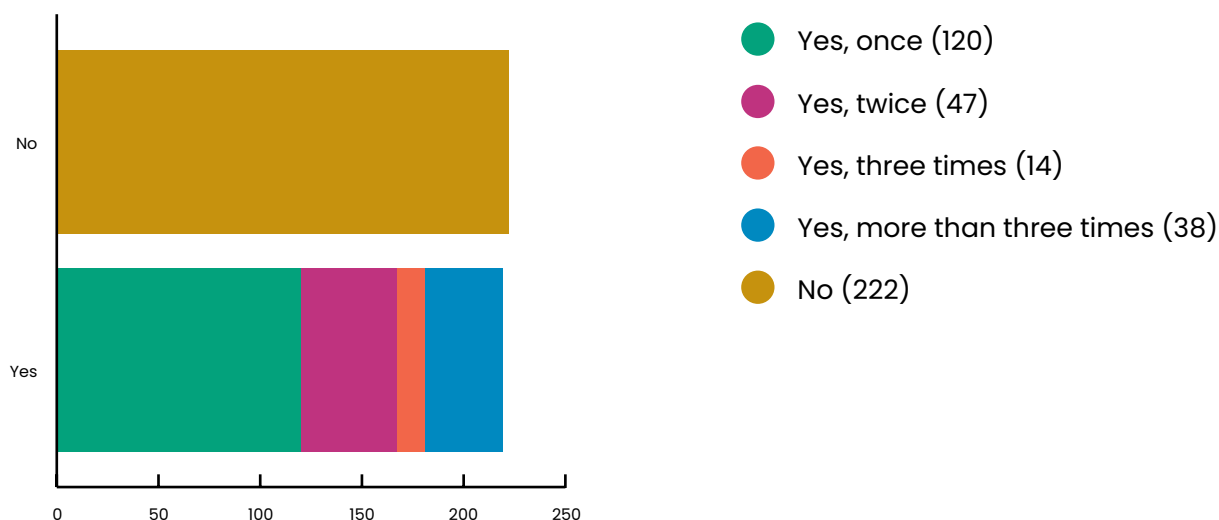
Using the midpoint of each parking range the average amount paid by students per week for parking at Bundoora is calculated at \$17.92 or \$430.08 a year assuming 12 weeks of attendance for each of two semesters.

Q6. Do you pay for public transport to Bundoora Campus? How much do you spend a week (on average)?



Using the same midpoint of each price range the average amount paid by students per week for public transport at Bundoora is calculated at \$20.96 or \$503.04 a year assuming 12 weeks of attendance for each of two semesters.

Q7. Have you ever received a parking fine at Bundoora campus?



Whilst RUSU understands that RMIT does not set the rates for parking fines they are currently almost seven times the cost of an all-day parking rate. Later in the survey students gave feedback that they felt this was disproportionate. Based on the average costs associated with parking on campus given above, a first offence parking fine costs more than the average a student will spend on two weeks of parking.

Q8. Do you want RMIT to introduce free student parking on Bundoora Campus?

Support from students for free parking in Bundoora is unequivocal. Students in Bundoora have been asking RUSU to advocate for the removal of paid parking since 2022. There is a clear link between the increase in students asking for free parking and the rise in the cost-of-living crisis and ongoing issues with the affordability of everyday expenses for young people in Melbourne.



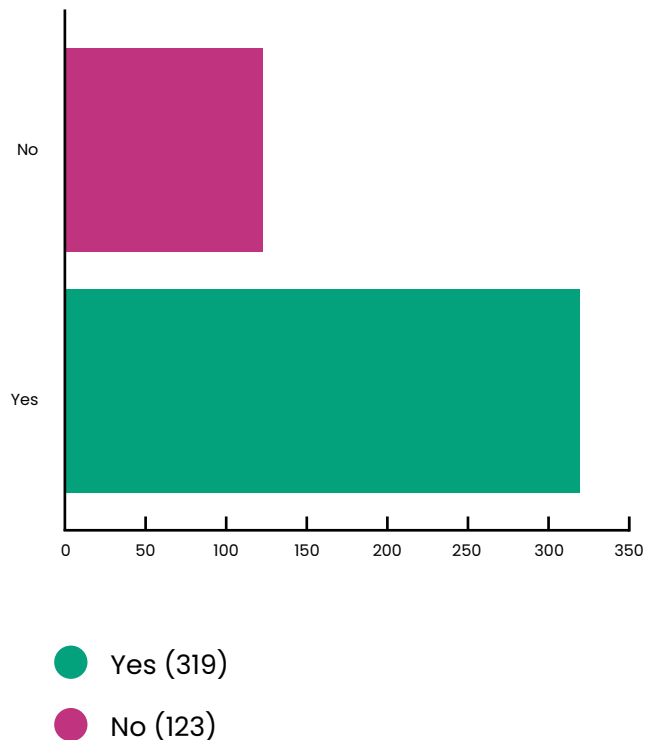


I have ADHD and have been fined multiple times for forgetting to pay for parking. I almost always pay but i don't think the punishment should be so harsh for simply forgetting to pay! Using the parking pass doesn't make sense for me as i only come to Bundoora once or twice a week. If the parking pass was only \$50 for the year i could justify it maybe"

Part 3: Impact of costs of travel and parking on student experience of studying at Bundoora campus

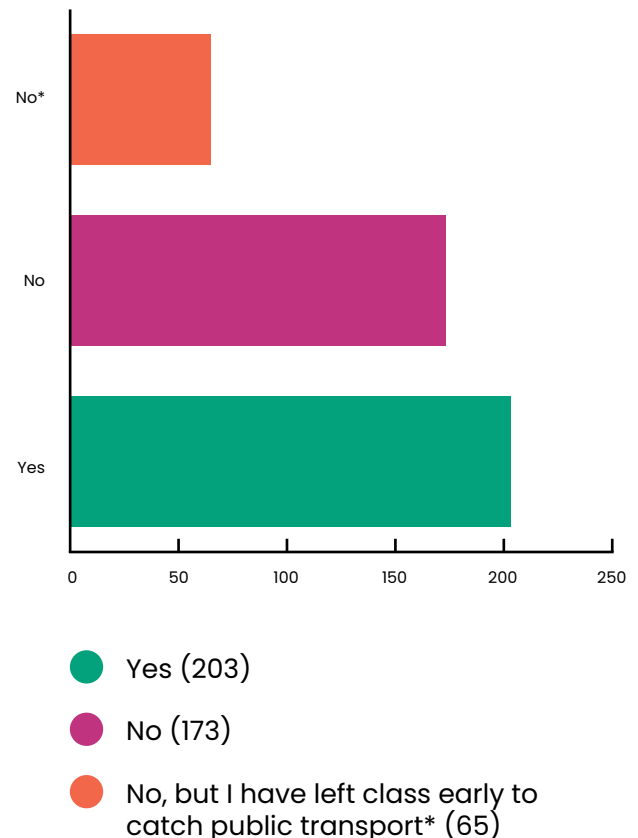
In the next set of questions, RUSU wanted to examine the impact of the costs of travel and parking on the student experience of studying on Bundoora campus. These questions were designed to explore if transport and parking costs changed the frequency or duration of time students spent on campus, and if there were other changes to the campus that could be made to encourage students to spend more time on campus.

Q9. Have the travel costs associated with going to uni ever prevented you from being on campus in person?



This includes all travel associated costs including public transport, tolls, fuel, vehicle maintenance and parking. Overall, 72% of respondents stated that the costs of transport prevented them from being on campus in person.

Q10. Have you ever left class early because your parking was going to expire?



61% of students have left class early because their parking was going to expire or because they needed to catch public transport. Feedback throughout this survey clearly illustrates that Bundoora is a difficult and time-consuming campus to access, whether via public transport or by car. Unfortunately, this forces students to prioritise their return journey, or avoiding a parking fine, over remaining in class.

Q11. If you park off campus, where do you park? How long does it take you to walk to class?

Students who indicated that they drive to campus were diverted to a question focused on parking. 296 respondents opted to answer this question. 52 stated that they prefer to park on campus and pay, and a further 78 indicated that the question did not apply to them which suggests they also pay to park on campus. Some expanded on their answers to say that accessibility issues prevented them from parking further away and walking to campus or that they had safety concerns related to parking off campus and walking in.

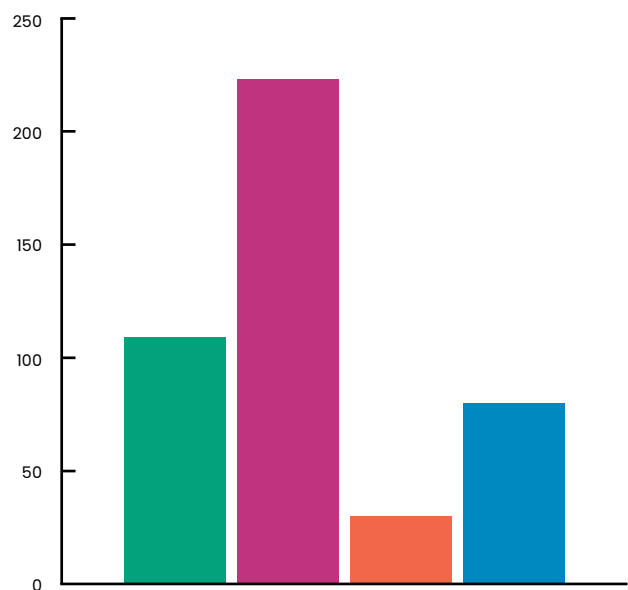
164 respondents said they opt to park elsewhere with 97 specifically stating that they park on Uni Hill. Most cited their travel time from Uni Hill to campus was between 10 and 20 minutes. One respondent cited the maximum two-hour parking at Uni Hill as problematic as they rarely had the time to return to Uni Hill to move their car at regular intervals. Parking at Uni Hill may be more affordable for students but it may be a cap to how much time they will spend on campus due to the two-hour limit. As question 10 indicates nearly half of all survey respondents have left class early because their parking was going to expire.

A further 67 students either responded to say that they parked on side streets or in residential areas and walked to campus or they simply gave an estimated time for their journey from their car to the campus. These respondents gave a travel time of between 5 and 30 depending on

where they parked and the location of their class. 2 respondents stated that they parked further afield and caught a tram to campus.

RUSU is aware of persistent issues with student safety leaving Bundoora campus on foot (even to walk to a car a short walk away) or via public transport. Responses to this question indicate that over half of all respondents are walking off campus to get to their cars.

Q12. Do you tend to hang out on Bundoora campus before or after your classes?



- No, I don't (109)
- Yes, before and after (223)
- Yes, before (30)
- Yes, after (80)

Whilst 75% of students indicated that they spend some time on campus before and/or after their classes, 25% of students choose to only visit campus to attend their classes. These students lose out on accessing free food, events and activities which could help build their sense of community and belonging as well as opportunities to study with peers and use library or other student support services.

Q13. What prevents you from spending more time on Bundoora campus?

Cost of parking has been cited as the reason most students do not spend more time on campus, with 75% of the 442 survey respondents selecting this answer (respondents were allowed to select multiple responses). They will pay for the minimum duration of parking they can afford and then leave as soon as their parking has expired. This coupled with the expensive and poor-quality food options most likely forces students to leave campus and visit Uni Hill or other retail outlets.



- Cost of parking (334)
- Work commitments (134)
- Family commitments (73)
- Poor food options on campus (185)
- I'd rather work/study at home (87)
- Other (39)

Q14. What changes could RMIT make to encourage students to stay longer on Bundoora campus?

Responses to this question were open ended and allowed students to give longer responses if desired. Responses fell into five main categories:

1. Changes to parking pricing
2. Campus life
3. Food access
4. Facilities and campus environment
5. Journey to campus

Feedback from students around parking prices varied. 208 of the 284 responses that included details around parking prices came from students who directly specified that free parking would allow them to stay longer on Bundoora campus. Others suggested a reduction or discount on parking would be sufficient. Comments included a lower flat rate fee for student all day parking (suggestions were around \$2 a day), a discount on parking for students e.g. students pay a percentage less than staff, offering free parking on specific weekdays and waiving or reducing parking fines for students.

122 responses included suggestions for better food access on campus. Most feedback in this area focussed on the need for more affordable food options on campus and for food of a higher quality to be available. Other suggestions included that food options on campus needed to be healthier, that more halal options needed to be available and that food needed to be available for longer hours to allow students to study later in the day.

69 responses related to campus life with students stating that more activities and events on campus would encourage them to stay on campus for longer. Responses in this topic area mainly discussed free food events, sporting events or club events. Hours were discussed with one student stating that they would like more events to occur after 3pm. 6 respondents said that more shops were required on campus, this might not necessarily be food outlets but could also include groceries or other non-food retail.

The next largest group of responses talked about facilities and the campus environment with 56 students making a comment about this topic. The majority of these responses asked for more (and more suitable) study spaces and for longer access hours for the library and study spaces. Other responses included more outdoor common areas, more canteen/cafeteria style spaces and student lounge style spaces. Students also mentioned that they would stay longer on campus if there was free gym access, better accessibility and more student services.

20 students talked about changes to their journey to and from campus. 10 respondents asked for changes to the shuttle bus service with a fairly equal split between respondents asking for a shuttle bus between other campuses, a shuttle bus to local train stations, and extended shuttle bus hours. The remaining 10 respondents said that better public transport connections or free/discounted public transport would keep them on campus for longer.

Q15. Any other thoughts you want to share with us about transport to and from campus including parking?

Many students responded with similar issues to those outlined above, that free or reduced cost parking would positively impact their student experience. There were some topics not covered earlier in the survey including:

- the mental burnout of such long, frequent journeys on public transport
- the feasibility of reaching campus via public transport, students quoted between 1.5 and 3+ hours of travel time each way if they tried to reach campus via PT
- that students already pay for their education and for student services and amenities fees and that parking fees on top of this is unfair
- that parking is free in Brunswick and students in Brunswick get a better deal
- that there is ample parking on campus and that charging would be understandable as parking was limited but with so much unused parking it appears that the university is trying to raise further income from students
- that students are forced to forgo essentials to spend money on parking
- that current issues with cost of living makes parking permits unobtainable
- that students who drive to Bundoora are factoring in the cost of fuel, tolls and maintenance as part of their journey to campus not just parking. Increases in fuel costs combined with continuing to pay for parking has made driving to campus increasingly unaffordable
- that purchasing a permit takes around two weeks and students have to pay a daily rate while they wait for RMIT to process a permit
- that parking fines should be waived if students have an exam



I think for the amount of time spent on campus for most students parking should be free. It's a heavy cost to pay week by week and it all adds up. From where I travel from there is no alternative to get to campus either and so spending so much money on fuel to travel an hour or more each day plus parking isn't helping with the current cost of living crisis as it is."

Summary

The RMIT University Student Union (RUSU) continues to receive strong and consistent feedback from students at Bundoora campus highlighting that paid parking is both unreasonable and unaffordable. Since students returned to campus following the COVID-19 lockdowns in 2022, the cost of parking has remained a persistent barrier to access.

While broader cost-of-living pressures have eased for some, students and young people continue to be disproportionately impacted by the rising cost of rent, food, and health care. For many, university attendance has become a financial decision, with students often forced to sacrifice basic necessities simply to be on campus.

Students feel aggrieved that they are required to pay for parking when they already pay extensive tuition fees and a student services and amenities fee. Students are aware that other RMIT students are not required to pay for parking (Brunswick, Point Cook) and have better public transport and sustainable transport options (City, Brunswick).

RUSU's recent student survey and analysis of travel patterns to Bundoora campus show a clear inequity in the current system. Many students pay for parking on a casual basis even though they attend regularly enough to benefit from a permit. This suggests that either the cost of permits is prohibitively high or that awareness is low. Based on student responses and midpoint calculations, the average weekly cost of student parking at Bundoora is approximately \$17.92, equating to \$430.08 annually (assuming 24 weeks of attendance). Total weekly costs associated with driving will be much higher once fuel, tolls and vehicle maintenance costs are factored in.

72% of students reported that transport costs have directly prevented them from attending campus in person. A further 61% have left class early due to parking expiry or public transport limitations. This disrupts learning and disengages students from the campus experience. The location of Bundoora makes it time-consuming to access regardless of mode, and the added stress of avoiding fines or missing transport causes further disruption. This is especially concerning considering that parking fines are seven times the cost of a daily rate, with a first offence exceeding the

cost of almost two weeks of parking. Students feel strongly that these fines are unreasonably high.

Bundoora is not well connected for public transport, students who do not live centrally in Melbourne may not have public transport options close to them and journey times to Bundoora via public transport can be long and arduous. The closest public transport option to Bundoora campus is a tram. The tram is a 10-minute walk from the main campus and the tram stop is known to be unsafe, particularly for women students. Public transport to campus is simply not a viable option for many students, they drive because they have no other choice.

RUSU supports RMIT's sustainable transport goals including promoting and encouraging the use of public transport, however it is important to highlight the issues of access (including travel time) and safety of using public transport in Bundoora. With the main option for sustainable transport in Bundoora being unfit for purpose for many students RUSU notes that RMIT does not currently provide alternative forms of sustainable transport to campus. Survey respondents noted the need for shuttle buses to local train stations and to other RMIT campuses as possible alternatives to driving or taking public transport to Bundoora.

Parking accessibility and safety also emerged as key themes. Among the 296 students who responded to the parking-specific question, over half of all respondents indicated they walk off campus to get to their parked car. This raises ongoing concerns about student safety, particularly after dark or in isolated areas around Bundoora.

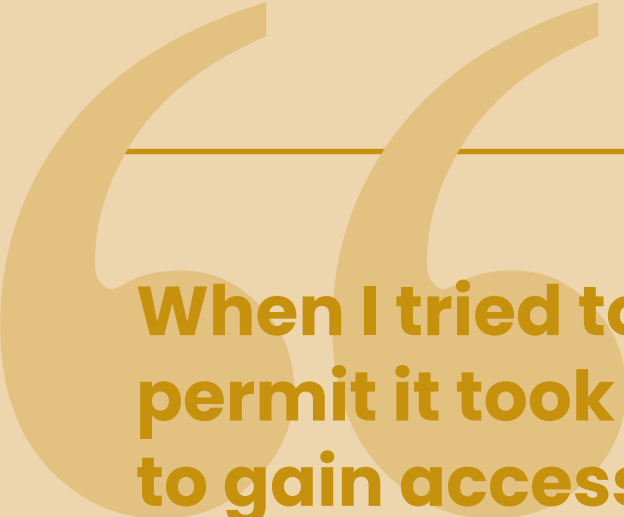
RUSU's survey also explored broader factors affecting campus engagement:

- 75% of students said that parking costs were the main reason they don't spend more time on campus.
- 73% who commented on parking suggested that free parking would allow them to stay longer. Others recommended significantly reduced rates, capped daily fees, student-specific discounts, or waived fines for low-income students or students taking exams.
- Several comments reflected a belief that students are already paying for their education and student amenities, and that parking fees are an unfair additional burden.

Additional feedback included:

- Mental exhaustion due to long commutes, sometimes exceeding three hours each way.
- Frustration at perceived inconsistencies across campuses (e.g., free parking at Brunswick and Point Cook).
- Suggestions for better public transport links including shuttle services to bus and train connections, subsidised public transport, extended shuttle services both in terms of hours or operation and areas covered, shuttle buses to other campuses and safer walking routes.
- Students indicated they would also stay on campus for longer if there was a more inviting campus environment including more activities and events, better study facilities and higher quality and lower cost food options

The demand for free parking is unequivocal. Since 2022, Bundoora students have consistently requested RUSU to advocate for the removal of paid parking. The overwhelming majority of survey responses support free parking as a way to reduce financial pressure, increase time spent on campus, and promote equity between campuses. By contrast, free parking is available at RMIT Brunswick and Point Cook, leading many students to feel disadvantaged and unfairly treated.



When I tried to buy an annual permit it took me a few weeks to gain access to the system. In the meantime I had to pay daily parking rates and even got a fine because I missed doing this once, overall I paid \$133 (~\$100 parking + \$33 fine) more than if the system worked and I could've bought the parking pass. I asked if the fine could've been waived but they refused. The location of Bundoora campus means that lots of students need to drive to save an hour worth of time on public transport (which they still have to pay for) and creates a disadvantage to studying that RMIT Bundoora over other universities and campuses."

Conclusion

There is compelling evidence that paid parking at Bundoora campus contributes to inequitable access to education, increases financial stress, and undermines students' ability to engage meaningfully in university life.

RUSU strongly recommends the introduction of free student parking at Bundoora campus as an immediate and tangible step to reduce the financial burden on students, promote equity, and support greater student engagement. Free parking is more than a convenience, it is a necessary measure to ensure students can fully participate in their education and campus community.

Alternative recommendations

Whilst RUSU's primary recommendation is that parking should be made free for students at Bundoora. There are alternatives that could support students to attend campus more frequently and remain on campus for longer.

- Further discount parking for students to a flat fee of \$2 a day.
- Make parking free for students on a limited number of days each week e.g. free parking on Wednesdays and Thursdays.
- Remove the need for Blue Badge holders to apply for an ADP annual disability permit through Easy Park to be eligible to use an accessible bay and park for free. Display of Australian Disability Parking permit (APP) – Category 1 should be sufficient. Students with Double Time (DT) Accessible Parking Permit (Category 2) are not required to apply for a separate permit to access double time parking on campus.
- Offer payment plans for students who want to secure a parking permit.
- Introduce new parking permit/ free parking zone for students on ELPs.

Students have many complaints about the unreasonable cost of parking fines and the narrow grounds of appeal. Given that RMIT has no control over the rate of fines or grounds for appealing under relevant acts, it is RUSU's understanding that RMIT can only choose to either retain the current system or remove paid parking and fines entirely.

If environmental issues are a motivating factor for keeping the cost of parking high, offering students cheaper and more sustainable transport options such as shuttle buses from train stations and other campuses, subsidising the cost of mykis etc. and offering free parking for e-cars all week and e-parking stations would be beneficial.

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