# The Hidden Costs of Uber and Lyft Rides at UC Santa Cruz

## Ride-hailing impacts on environment, traffic

BY SARAH BELLE LIN

If you're a student at UC Santa Cruz, you might have stopped to curse the infamous terrain. Kresge College has rugged walkways that can leave you sore in the morning. Steinhart Way weaves in and out through lush redwood trees, but climbing up Science Hill can have your knees begging for a break. When the exhaustion kicks in and class is just minutes from starting, you might pull out your phone to hail an Uber or Lyft.

During the 2017-18 school year, there were about 400 daily ride-hailing trips made to UCSC and about 100 daily trips to get from one part of campus to another. About 20,000 Lyft drop-off and pick-up trips were completed on campus from October 2017 to March 2018, according to Lyft data provided for a UCSC study published in June 2018. Factor in Uber rides and an estimated 40,000 ride-hailing trips were made in six months at UCSC.

Former environmental studies and sustainability student Lyndel Fusello, who graduated in spring 2018, led and organized "The Status and Mitigation of Ride-Hailing Services on the UCSC Campus," a study conducted with UCSC Transportation and Parking Services (TAPS).

Fusello was interested in why so many UCSC students chose to use ride-hailing services, like Uber and Lyft, and what this meant for other transportation methods.

### TOP RIDE-HAILING TRIP TIMES

**Looking at travel patterns for just on-campus ride-hailing trips from her study, Fusello found the highest demand period for ride-hailing services was between 6 p.m. and midnight. This might indicate ride-hailing individuals feel safer using Lyft or Uber at night or rely on these services when intoxicated.**

**There is only a minor difference between this demand period and the second highest – 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. – when most classes are scheduled. This means individuals are relying on ride-hailing services during class time almost as much as during the evening.**

"There are so many people using Uber and Lyft to get from one location on campus to another," Fusello said. "That level of reliance is unnecessary on our campus."

There are additional costs riders might not think twice about when hailing a car. Growing trends of students relying on Lyft and Uber to take them up to and around campus bear bad news for the environment.

Fusello said the survey she administered was self-reported by students, staff and faculty taking the survey themselves. Because of this, she said the survey was not encompassing of the entire UCSC population. Still, the 2,000 survey responses showed interesting results.

Fusello found that if Uber and Lyft were not available, up to 56 percent of individuals at UCSC would have either walked, biked, taken public transit or skipped the trip. To break down the responses even further, 21.3 percent of individuals would have taken public transit, 15.4 percent would have walked, 5.4 percent would have biked and 13.9 percent would have not gone at all.

UCSC environmental studies assistant professor Adam Millard-Ball said Lyft and Uber ridership is a symptom of how cheap car travel is. With increased ridership comes increased traffic congestion, contributing to greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and leaving more sustainable transportation methods behind.

"If we're thinking about greenhouse gas emissions, then we're certainly not paying for the cost of climate change and local air pollution," Millard-Ball said.

Data from the Climate Registry Information System (CRIS) shows mobile, or vehicle, emissions at UCSC contributed to a total of 2,199 metric tons of carbon dioxide in 2016.

That's equivalent to about 787,890 gallons of gasoline consumed. It would need 2,590 acres of forests — the size of 41,440 tennis courts — to sequester, or capture and store, the carbon dioxide.

According to CRIS data, 2,199 metric tons is the highest amount of carbon dioxide emissions recorded since CRIS began its measurements of UCSC emissions in 2010. After Uber began its services the year prior in 2009, the next year saw 928 metric tons of carbon dioxide emissions at UCSC. Lyft came into the circuit shortly after in 2012. In that span of eight years, on-campus greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions increased by 42.2 percent.

Given the influx of students, who continue to add to the nearly 19,500 who already travel to or around campus, these GHG emission levels could continue to rise and contribute to

climate change impacts in the area — longer and more intense storms and wildfires, coastal erosion and sea level rise.

As a part of its Clean Air Plan to reduce emissions, Uber pledged to first require all drivers in London to use either hybrid or electric cars by the end of 2019 and all electric by 2025.

In a press release published in 2017, Lyft announced its climate impact goals will be advised by environmentalist and UC Berkeley alumnus Paul Hawken. Lyft stated when its climate impact goals are achieved, carbon dioxide emissions will be reduced for the U.S. transportation sector as a whole by at least 5 million tons per year by 2025.

Both Uber and Lyft claim they are also focused on reducing congestion — which can turn into a hotbed for GHG emissions — in cities by getting more people into fewer cars. Millard-Ball said although these plans seem like a positive step, they do not address vehicle traffic and consequently, road safety.

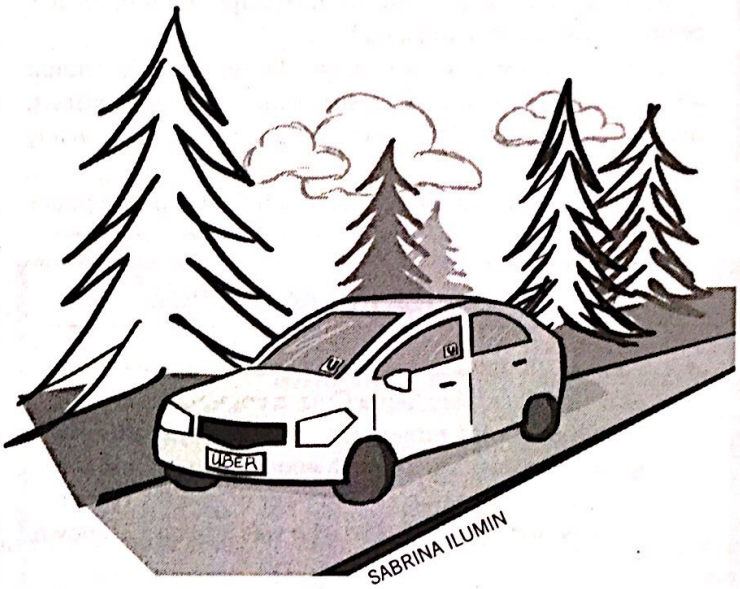
"From a point of a view of traffic congestion and safety for pedestrians and bicyclists, an electric car is the same as a regular car," Millard-Ball said.

TAPS director Larry Pageler said as the adoption of ride-hailing companies becomes greater at UCSC, vehicle traffic will consequently increase. Like Millard-Ball, he throws most of his support behind public transit use, but believes the Santa Cruz METRO needs a major overhaul.

"If we can increase the confidence that you will get on a bus and it will get you to class on time, then I think we're moving our customers, moving our community and we're helping mitigate that traffic volume issue," Pageler said.

While use of ride-hailing services is inevitable and will continue to grow, the reliance on ride-hailing services over more sustainable transportation methods points to a direction modern society is heading toward.

"If our society solely does things because they're convenient, we're not going to be able to solve any of the issues — especially environmental issues — that we're facing today," Fusello said. "We need to steer away from convenience."



SABRINA ILUMIN