

# With taxpayer help, Syracuse University builds \$4 million parking lot

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SYRACUSE, N.Y. – What do you call a parking lot that has 99 parking spaces, 12 bike racks and a bus shelter?

You'd call it an "intermodal transportation center," if the federal government was giving you nearly \$4 million to build it.

Syracuse University has begun construction on a \$4.4 million project at the **Syracuse Center of Excellence** that will include a privately owned surface parking lot for 99 vehicles. Federal highway funds will pay 80 percent of the cost -- at least \$3.5 million.

Next to the parking lot, SU will build a small, open-air pavilion with vending machines that will provide shelter to people waiting for the Centro bus on East Washington Street. Attached to the wall of the shelter will be 12 bike racks. Dozens of solar panels will line the parking lot.

Despite the pavilion (estimated to cost \$772,000) and the solar panels (\$225,000), the most obvious role of the new facility will be to provide on-site parking for cars at the Center of Excellence, a research center. Employees and visitors have been parking in leased off-site lots since center **opened five years ago**.

Some of the parking spaces will be left open for public use. SU will charge at least as much as other parking lots in the area, because federal subsidies cannot be used to undercut market rates.

But don't call the new development a parking lot within earshot of SU officials. They secured a federal grant in 2005 to build an intermodal transportation center and, by golly, that's what they're building.

The university even invited 76 people to a 2006 conference to **brainstorm ideas** to make the new facility truly innovative. Among the many suggestions: Offer bike rentals; open an internet café and tourism center; connect to trains, planes and buses; provide a rope tow for bikes going up the SU hill; start a gondola service.

Edward Bogucz, executive director of the Center of Excellence, concedes that the intermodal transportation center – or ITC, as he calls it – offers fewer innovations for non-car travelers than SU officials envisioned when they asked for federal money a decade ago. Because of pollution issues on the site, the money didn't go as far as anticipated.

But Bogucz pointed out that the new pavilion will have a drinking fountain where bicyclists can top off their water bottles, plus rentable lockers where they could stow their gear. Someday, it could grow into a hub for a bike-sharing program, he said.

Standing atop the center's third-floor roof, with a view of downtown Syracuse, Bogucz said he envisions collaborating scientists



and entrepreneurs bicycling back and forth between the Center of Excellence and downtown venues such as the Tech Garden.

"We are committed to human-powered transportation," Bogucz said. "Syracuse is right on the threshold of developing a biking and walking culture that would transform the city."

As he spoke, an existing bike rack at the Center of Excellence sat empty and unused.

In 2005, U.S. Sen. Charles Schumer and then-Sen. Hillary Clinton obtained a \$4 million grant for SU to build an intermodal transportation center at the future site of the Center of Excellence, which was later constructed with \$41 million funded mostly by New York state.

The Center of Excellence has labs where researchers pursue new commercial products in the fields of energy and environmental systems. The research ranges from wood-based biofuels to personal air conditioners to indoor air quality.

Schumer and Clinton included the parking facility grant in a \$286 billion transportation bill that was notorious for containing more than 6,300 pork-barrel earmarks. Among them was the \$200 million "bridge to nowhere" in Alaska, which Sen. John McCain opposed and later railed against during his 2008 presidential campaign.

SU officials had planned to erect a building that would include a parking garage, a bus stop, sheltered parking and possibly showers for bicyclists, and maybe a newsstand. Bogucz said he even dreamed of installing an undercarriage wash that would remove salt from cars entering the garage during winter.

But university discovered during construction of the Center of Excellence that the 3-acre site, formerly home to the L.C. Smith typewriter factory and Midtown Plaza, was badly polluted and costly to build upon. Even now, the crews excavating the area designated for a parking lot wear respirators and protective clothing, and the dirt around them is sprayed continuously with water to keep asbestos and other pollutants from going airborne.

Removing contaminated soil and monitoring pollution on the site will cost \$2 million or more, roughly half the cost of the project, according to estimates SU provided to state transportation officials. SU also is installing a storm water detention basin and a series of pipes to control runoff from the parking lot, adding to the expense.

University officials had to settle for a surface parking lot, but they were determined to make the new facility more than that, Bogucz said. In addition to the pavilion and the bike racks, some six dozen free-standing solar panels will be arrayed along the southern edge of the parking lot, enough to generate 17 kilowatts of power.

For now, the solar panels will offset electricity used by vending machines in the pavilion and LED lights over the parking lot. In the future, the university plans to install five charging stations for electric vehicles in the parking lot, if more funding for the equipment can be secured, Bogucz said.

Someday, SU might also install charging stations for electric bicycles, or E-bikes, Bogucz said. That might require legislation, however. E-bikes are currently illegal in New York unless they require pedaling to assist the motor.

James Wade, project manager from CBD Construction, which is building the new facility, said the visual impact of the solar panels will help spark interest in alternative modes of transportation such as electric vehicles and bikes.

"There's a secondary effect just to having those things there and seeing them," Wade said. "I think it helps to drive people to make the right choices."

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The new intermodal transportation center is scheduled to open this fall.

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