America’s dependence on (& romance with) cars
- Most Americans see cars as a basic necessity, not a luxury.
- Poor public transportation network (exceptions: Ann Arbor area & major cities)

Airplane: Long distance traveling is mostly by flying—buy student-rate tickets from STA Travel, (www.statravel.com), tel. 734-769-2555—for lowest price, buy 3-4 weeks in advance! Check Delta website (www.delta.com) for special deals. Some airlines such as Frontier (www.flyfrontier.com).

Southwest (www.southwest.com) and Spirit (www.spiritair.com) have low fares, but beware of extra charges for seats, luggage, etc! These airlines all use the Detroit Metro airport.

Train: AMTRAK – www.amtrak.com can be an excellent alternative for some popular destinations such as Chicago; Ann Arbor is fortunate to have a train station! Click on “Deals” for student discounts & railpasses—for extensive travel, check out the “USA Railpass” available for various numbers of days.

Bus: Greyhound (www.greyhound.com) is the only inter-city bus company and serves many destinations that trains do not – check their website for student discounts.

Alternatives to buying a car – please consider because cars are so very expensive!
- Walking
- Bicycle (best buy! – just be sure to get a strong lock). Note that all AATA buses have a rack on the front, on which you can put your bike, and the bus is free! – for biking in Ann Arbor see www.getdowntown.org/bike
- Taxicabs may cost $5 to $15 per local ride – cost of owning a car would buy hundreds of taxi rides
- U-M Car-Sharing (Zipcar) – Join for $25, rent car for as little as 1 hour – www.zipcar.com/umich
- Find a ride with someone else through Zimride – www.zimride.com/umich
- Borrow a friend’s car, but make sure the friend has car insurance!
- Motorcycle/moped (not recommended)

Considerations in buying a car in the U.S.
History of a (bad) reputation: before cars, horses & “horse traders”. Today we have the used car salesman (“would you buy a used car from this man”?) BUYER BEWARE!!!, caveat emptor
There’s no state regulation (inspections) for car safety or reliability & no state guarantee of sales transactions. “AS-IS” = NO GUARANTEE. If a dealer offers a guarantee, it must be stated in writing to be legally binding.

Legal processes: see the State of Michigan “Secretary of State” website, http://www.michigan.gov/sos/ (click on “Owning A Vehicle,” then “Buying A Vehicle”) for essential information on how to transfer the TITLE (ownership document) of the car, car INSURANCE requirements, and how to obtain a LICENSE PLATE for the car—but first you will have to obtain CAR INSURANCE and a driver’s license. To obtain a DRIVER’S LICENSE, be sure to go to the IC orientation session for that purpose – otherwise, you’ll need to go in-person to the Secretary of State’s office.

Where to look & How much? – Dealers vs Private Owners?
MLive.com “classifieds”, http://autos.mlive.com (can search by city, price, etc.—Ann Arbor’s newspaper website)
Auto Trader, www.autotrader.com and Ebay Autos, www.motors.ebay.com -- (be sure to limit your search by distance from your zip/code); excellent websites include links to CarFax/AutoCheck reports
Craigslist Ann Arbor cars+trucks, http://annarbor.craigslist.org/cta/ (private owners & dealers)

Is the specific car any good?
- Best/worst brand reliability and advice—Consumer Reports, www.consumerreports.org click on “Used Car” (or buy hard-copy at bookstore)
- Car Talk website for more info, good mechanics, etc. - http://www.cartalk.com/content/mechx
- Care by previous owner – ask to see service records and repair bills if buying from private individual.
- Check car’s “Vehicle Identification Number” (VIN) in CARFAX, www.carfax.com, for whether title is valid, history of accidents, “odometer check” (how many miles), etc. Look for the VIN behind the glass front windshield on the driver’s side.
- Consider Mileage, Rust, Age, and consider documented care the car has had by owner(s).
- “Road test” it – check for smoke from exhaust after car is warmed up, bad brakes, steering, tires etc. If you’re thinking of buying it, first have a mechanic check it out—it may need thousands of dollars of repairs to be safe—IC online article lists recommended mechanics at http://www.internationalcenter.umich.edu/life/usedcar.html

Add up the expenses before you buy, which far exceed the actual price of the car—see checklist!