By Bryanna Bartlett

When San Jose State kinesiology sophomore Caitlin Bettenay went home over winter break to Sunshine Coast, Australia, all she saw was red. “I saw the red sky above the blue water and the trees were completely burnt,” Bettenay said. Australian SJSU students returned to campus while the fires continued.

The Australian wildfires have burned between 12 million and 24 million acres of land with nearly 60 fires still burning, 2,000 homes evacuated and approximately 30 recorded deaths, according to BBC News. Bettenay first heard the news about the fires while she was on campus. “I was pretty shocked, especially because one of the first places to go up in fire was really close to my house,” Bettenay said. “It was literally in the next town over, like 10 minutes away, if that.”

As she followed updates on the fires, Bettenay wished she could help more. “Obviously I would post on my social media and I would help out with the donations,” she said. “But I felt hopeless. I couldn’t be home when home needed me.”

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The Australian wildfires have proved difficult to contain because of the soils inability to absorb rainwater, according to ABC News. “Sometimes the soil gets so dry that the water ends up running off of it rather than absorbing into it,” Craig Clements, SJSU meteorology professor and Fire Weather Research Laboratory director, said in an email. “Wildfires can also change the soil properties due to its intense heat and this causes the soil to respond to rain differently than before.”

Harry Nixon, a biology sophomore at San Jose State University, said he will likely return home over spring break. “It’s pretty stressful enough to prepare for class, and on top of that you’re running late,” Cardona said as he waited for his transfer bus on First Street. “I’ve been late to class. It’s pretty stressful enough to prepare for class, and on top of that you’re running late.”

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Cardona said as he waited for his transfer bus on First Street. According to VTA’s website and flyers distributed by VTA employees, the Santa Clara Valley Transit Authority has reduced the number of bus runs, which now takes almost three hours.

The departure times for some, public transportation is the only option for commuting, and VTA’s discontinuance of transit routes and buses have made commuting to San Jose State much more difficult. “I’m so annoyed about it honestly. It’s less convenient. Just 15 minutes makes a significant difference because if you miss it, that’s it,” Tanisha Dave, sociology sophomore, said.

Dave commutes to SJSU on bus route 42, which now only arrives every hour instead of every 45 minutes. “I’m so annoyed about it honestly, it’s less convenient,” Dave said. “Just 15 minutes makes a significant difference because if you miss it, that’s it.”

Other students now have to transfer buses instead of taking a direct route. “It used to be that I could just take one line and reach my workplace, but now I have to transfer,” English freshman Rose Zhu said. “I want 10 minutes in between.”

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