

Everywhere

ing before 10 a.m.” signs to keep away non-resident commuters that might park there all day for free and walk a block to the subway. Or the “one-hour free parking” signs to provide a slightly inconvenient, but cheap high-turnover area for overflow shoppers along the main drag. These and similar control techniques come at a high cost of enforcement and loss of cus-

Ticketing appears to happen only when someone on the street calls to complain.

tomers to local businesses. Another odd from of parking control is the sign that says, “Three hours free parking.” In Toronto, they are used on residential streets far from shopping and subway stops and are meant to force you to park in your driveway or to ensure that your cousin can’t stay more than three hours.

Why not just meter all these places, thereby decriminalizing legitimate parking and let people do the business and visit-

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The Low Cost of Parking Everywhere

from Page 33

ing they want, for however long they want? Because the cost of on-street meters would never provide a return. So now we are stuck with sporadic, barely self-financing tire-marking, which is uneven and only modestly effective. On my street (three hours free, the unsigned default), cars get ticketed about once a month, which appears to happen only when someone on the street calls to complain.

Bottom line: The current cost of metering is too high to price at the margins and the margins are everywhere except in the very core and on the busiest streets. So "No Free Parking" ain't happening. Only "Painful Parking Practices" is happening.

A Solution has Arrived

Thanks to EU directives to move to wide-area road-pricing, the demand for in-car meters to accurately measure road use for distance-based road-user charging has provided the impetus for the innovation of a high-precision, GPS-based, tolling meter that works for distance-based road-use pricing and automotive liability premiums – even in deep city centers where until now GPS signals were so disturbed by tall buildings that it could not be used for reliable tolling.

With some extra work, one of these meters now doubles as an in-vehicle parking meter.

This device requires no user interaction, no ground beacon, no phone call, no rate selection, no button to turn on or off. It knows when you are parked, what the correct rate is, and best of

all, it is "location anonymous" – i.e., your location is not reported to the billing center, only a list of what you owe to each parking operator (and road authority and insurance company) – so it is not possible to be tracked. If you want to audit your bill to check the exact location and time, you have to provide a password to allow your location data out of your vehicle and into a program that will decode your geography into an auditable bill.

So what? This unit zeros out the marginal cost of metering a new parking spot, and the marginal cost of self-financed enforcement via mobile license plate recognition for that new spot is only \$10 to \$100 per year, depending on how frequently you wish to scan the vehicle in that spot. So now on my three-hour-free-parking street, you could meter non-residents for a fractional amount – say, 1/2 cent a minute – tire-marking only those who park over three hours without a meter.

A touchless on-board parking meter allows for citation-free parking. As an example, one could attract shoppers with 20 minutes of free parking, 100 minutes of modestly charged parking, followed by any number of minutes of more expensive parking, designed to promote turnover and to replace the citation revenue. Parking rates are set in a database, administered according to local needs and posted to show local rates.

Many residential areas controlled by permit require guests to leave at, say, midnight or risk a fine. Such streets could be priced modestly throughout the day and more aggressively after midnight (residents exempt) – all scaled to suit the neighborhood.

Bern Grush is the founder of Skymeter Corp. He can be reached at bgrush@skymetercorp.com.

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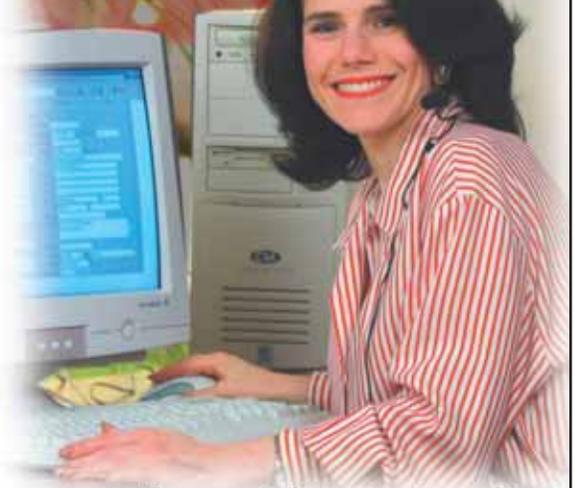
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JVH comments on Parking News every day at PT Blog – log on at www.parkingtoday.com. Each month, there are at least 40 other comments like these, posted daily.

How Do Cities Collect Past-due Parking Fees?

Baltimore has hired a Texas firm to help collect past-due parking fines. The only issue I have is that I know of certainly half a dozen, maybe more, companies that assist cities in collecting parking fines, and this company isn't on my list. That doesn't mean they won't do a good job. They may be aces at this. According to their web site, they focus on hospitals, back taxes, but parking isn't stressed.

I bring this up only because as we all know that parking is a contentious issue at best, and a disaster at worst. The way fines are collected and the attitude of the collectors are extremely important. As one of my friends says: "It must be turned from an enforcement transaction to a simple

business transaction."

Also, the concept of getting people to pay is a citywide issue that needs to have finance, enforcement, public works, law enforcement, legal, the merchants and citizens in the community, the city council and mayor, as well as public relations, all working in tandem to change the paradigm and get people to understand the need for fines, the need to follow the rules – in fact, even the need for those rules.

Simply hiring a collection agency may collect some of the past-due fines, but it seldom makes the problem go away.

If I were a business and had a significant past-due problem (i.e., people not paying their bills), I would not only look at them, but I would look at myself and try to find out what I'm doing wrong. I think cities need to do that, too. There are major issues, a big one being simply that people move around so much in city government that those responsible for one thing this year have moved on next year. Programs aren't looked at as citywide problems but

department problems.

I'm sure the law firm of Linebarger Goggan Blair & Sampson do a fine job. They handle parking-ticket collections in Miami, Chicago, Houston and Dallas, as well as in Baltimore. It's just that I think the problem is bigger than sending notices, making phone calls and impounding someone's car.

Dropping Parking Meters

I noted that Crawfordsville, IN, was dropping its parking meters. Here's a comment from a reader: "Think there might be a bigger reason than the parking meters for not going downtown?"

I did a bit of research and think my correspondent may be correct. Crawfordsville is a small town about a half-hour-plus drive from Indianapolis. They are charging 10 cents an hour for on-street parking. I'm sure it costs more than that to collect the 10 cents. People don't come downtown because of a 10 cent charge? I

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Financing University Park

BY RICHARD A. RICH



More students attend college and have cars than ever before, so finding parking on campus is becoming a greater concern for university officials. Many privately fund residence halls and academic buildings, but it wasn't until parking became an issue on campuses that they began to consider private funding for parking structures. Recent studies on student retention have shown that one of the top two reasons students leave a university is because it lacks parking. To stay competitive and increase retention, universities must provide accessible parking to students.

In the past, parking structures were typically financed through a university's general fund. However, as on-campus parking became more common, most universities created their own parking departments. Universities expected parking

departments to finance improvements from their revenue. These parking departments were considered self-sustaining "enterprise funds," cultivated from parking fees and fines, which were used to build additional parking or improvements and also to fund parking maintenance costs on campus.

About 15 years ago, privatization came and changed the way universities

Privatization and Partnerships Can Fund On-Campus Parking Facilities

finance parking projects. Today's universities have a host of new options when it comes to financing parking structures.

Privatization allows a college or university to be independent from managing the development, design and construction process. The entire development process can be partly or totally controlled by an outside concern. The university hires one team consisting of a designer, contractor and developer that builds and finances the parking development.

One variant of this is a turn-key project. The developer/designer/contractor team develops the parking, and when the

project is completed, the university buys the project at the agreed-upon price. This saves money because the price was set prior to construction to ensure that any mistakes or unforeseen costs are not the university's responsibility and are not added on to the final price.

Another option is to have the developer own the parking facility outright. In this case, the developer either buys or leases the land from the college or university and develops and manages the end product. Sometimes the parking will be developed with another development such as commercial or office space in the parking structure.

Privatization tends to lower the cost and time required for constructing an on-campus parking facility. A private entity may be able to get a lower cost for construction than a university since they can do a negotiated contract with a contractor as opposed to a public bid.

The downside to privatization is that the universities may not have control over the project process unless they take steps in the beginning. It's important to make sure that the development team is capable of meeting or exceeding those standards. The campus facilities department should

Parking Structures

still be involved with the project from inception to completion.

One way to do this is for the university to control the development and design documents, so they can tell the development team exactly what they want. In the end, it's the university that pays for the project, so they should also monitor the development team to ensure they're doing quality work. The problem is that for these financing partnerships to work, universities must relinquish some control over the project process.

Another challenge many universities face is how to finance a parking addition. With the turn-key project, the university must pay for the project when complete. Most often, the debt service and operating expenses are paid



for by user fees and fines.

Where a parking structure is privately financed and developed, the question is: Will the developer be allowed to charge higher parking fees than the university currently charges, since many view privatized parking as competition for parking demand? This could further alienate faculty, staff and students. What the developer is able to charge for parking, hours of operation, etc. need to be negotiated up front.

One solution may be a lease-back. A private developer that partners with a university may provide a lease-back to the university when the project is complete. This way, the university can possibly complete the transaction off-balance sheet and then control the parking

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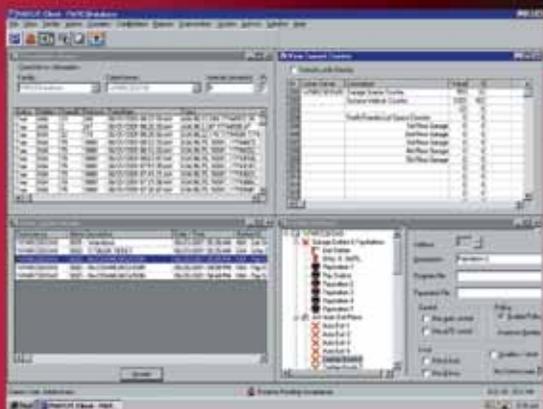
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Financing University Parking Structures

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charges, hours of operation, etc. to meet their standard service levels. Using an off-balance sheet type of lease may not affect future borrowing by the university because the lease payment may not show as a debt.

So what happens if a university needs additional parking but can't afford to hire a turn-key team or use university funds to finance a new structure? There are other partnership options where the cost is divided and funding partly comes from the university's partner. For instance, municipalities often partner with universities to provide additional parking within the community for students and faculty. Universities bring in thousands of dollars of revenue to the community, so the municipalities want to keep students and faculty local. One way for a municipality to do this is to partner with a university and construct a parking facility that can accommodate both the university and the local community.

Building a parking facility in a busy downtown area reduces parking congestion on the streets while providing parking on nights, weekends and in the summer. The city's revenue will increase because students and faculty park downtown, so they spend more time and money in the community. The university also benefits from the partnership because more parking spaces are available on campus so fewer students will transfer because of parking issues.

Although parking ranks highly in terms of importance to students, many school officials are more concerned with academic and recreational buildings and don't understand how parking significantly impacts the quality of life on campus. While some schools hold fundraising campaigns and rely on donations to fund parking facilities, it can take years to generate enough money. At some campuses, parking is an immediate necessity, and this system may take too long.

Aside from partnering with municipalities, there is another solution for universities experiencing difficulty in coming up with funding for parking structures. Combining parking development with the development of a new facility, such as a

sports venue, can give students the additional service while also providing additional parking. In the case of a sports facility, incorporating parking into the building's development may allow the parking structure to be financed through the capital project of the sports facility. This makes the new facility easily accessible to university visitors and the outside community, which generates revenue while providing enough parking to increase student retention levels and make the university a top competitor among its peers.

While it's important to remember that parking is a crucial element for any university, it's equally as vital to know that there are a variety of financing options for developing a parking structure. Whether it's through a privatized system, turn-key team, municipality partnership or funding parking in combination with another building, colleges and universities can develop the parking they need to attract and retain students and to give the university a competitive advantage.

Richard A. Rich is Director of Parking Planning and Services at Rich and Associates. He can be reached at rarich@richassoc.com

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doubt that very much. Even “Widow Dolph” on her fixed income can afford a dime, probably even a quarter. My guess is that downtown Crawfordsville needs some reason for people to come down there.

OK, they have the CVS and the Walgreens, plus probably a grocery store or two and a couple of banks, but most of them have parking, off-street. The people who need the on-street parking – the small shops, jewelers, coffee houses, bars and the like – have their employees parking on-street and taking up the parking. After all, at \$16 a month, why not?

I wonder if there is a Wal-Mart or a supermarket out on the edge of town with the usual supporting shops and restaurants. If so, downtown may be suffering from the fact that it's simply easier and better to go to the Wal-Mart than come downtown.

The plan is to take out the meters and keep the 2-hour maximum parking limit. But how will they enforce that if they aren't enforcing it now with the meters? Without the meters, it will be license to steal parking in downtown Crawfordsville.

The merchants need to get together and invest in revitalizing downtown. They have a new drugstore and library; how 'bout some sidewalk cafes, a weekly festival, a strolling musician or two? Crawfordsville might be just the right distance from Indianapolis for people to drive out in the evening for a nice dinner or to take a stroll down memory lane. Who knows?

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Extending Notification to Campus

BY SAMUEL SHANES

Most challenges facing campus parking facilities usually have been related to two types of events: emergency and the service/information situations. The essential question campus security officials needed to address for both was: "How can an individual inside the parking facility notify the appropriate person on the outside about the assistance they need?"



entire affected population. Instead, experts suggest that campus security officials focus on assembling the best possible combinations of alert and notification equipment that will ultimately result in systems capable of delivering constant and varying messages to all areas on a campus in the event of an emergency.

A survey of college campuses showed that the best possible campus-wide notification systems involved the use of sirens, reverse 911, cellphone alerts and broadcasts.

Although these methods may be effective for most on-campus locations, in the parking facility, some of these methods are limited in their ability to notify individuals inside the facility of an emergency situation or to convey a site-specific message.

Sirens are one of the most commonly used alert systems, but a comprehensive survey found that 95% of the respondents did not know the difference in the meaning between an alternating steady siren and a wail siren tone. Ultimately, inside an enclosed parking facility, sirens are effective in providing a general alert, but are limited in carrying a precise message.

The same survey also found that 50% of the students would not immediately pick up a ringing phone, thus limiting the use of reverse 911, another popular alert method. In addition, because of the parking facility's solid infrastructure, reliance on the use of cellphone alerts as a way of notifying an individual is problematic at best.

Broadcasts, in the traditional sense, deliver only general messages. In order to be most effective, individuals inside a parking facility in a campus-wide emer-

These days, as college and university safety systems and procedures are in the process of undergoing extensive re-evaluations, at least in part due to the Virginia Tech tragedy, campus security officials also must address the exact opposite issue: "How can security officials on the outside inform those inside the parking facility of what is going on, and what action they should be taking for their own safety and well-being?"

An effective campus-wide mass notification system is recognized as an absolute necessity for every school campus, and is an essential component in containing the potential impact of a crisis.

Although planning and deploying such a system is always challenging to campus security officials, on-campus parking facilities in particular can potentially pose special difficulties in the deployment and use of some common elements of a campus notification system.

Campus Parking vs. Mass Notification

A study completed by a team at the University of Central Florida to address the needs of campus alert/mass notification systems suggests that an effective and efficient mass notification system must meet three requirements (for details, see sidebar):

The consensus – and reality – is that there is no all-in-one solution that will provide complete notification to the

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Emergency Notification Requirements

- The system must be able to reach and inform a large population of students and teachers and surrounding areas within a small interval of time.
- The system must be able to deliver site-specific information to people in different areas.
- The system must provide back-up power and phone capabilities in the event of a power outage or downed telephone service.



Parking Facilities

gency must be able to receive site-specific information and evacuation/safety procedures.

Campus Parking's Best Approach to Mass Notification

The intense reassessment of campus security has led to advances in communications equipment that provide solutions that overcome the challenges put forth by campus parking.

The recent emergence of the latest class of wide-area emergency broadcast systems is a perfect example of this progress, and currently represents the best possible solution for mass notification that will not potentially exclude the parking facility.

These systems, in wall-mount form, are a combination of emergency phone and warning system, adapted specifically toward the communication needs of the campus environment with attention to the limitations of areas such as a remote parking facility.

Like traditional emergency/information phone stations, the wide-area broadcast system features a blue light/strobe and emergency phone that provides two-way communication for personal emergencies and service calls. Unlike traditional phone stations, the new systems feature powerful re-entrant speakers capable of broadcasting live messages, recorded automated messages and siren tones.

Emergency phone towers, used in open parking lots, also can be combined with wide-area emergency broadcasting system capability to provide location-specific announcements.

Although these systems provide powerful broadcasts, they are still far more focused than the traditional warning systems, such as those used for tornado alerts, and can be strategically placed throughout campus parking, as well as other facilities, to deliver localized and site-specific broadcasts to different areas that are all controlled from a single command station.

Through this integrated system, campus security officials can receive emergency phone calls; maintain visual and auditory communication with the station's location; and transmit emergency messages via phone line or wirelessly to the stations individually, in selected groups or in all-call for larger area coverage, and essentially notify an entire campus of an emergency situation and procedures within a matter of seconds.

In Conclusion

An effective and reliable emergency mass notification system that includes all parking facilities should be included in every campus communication system.

Planning for the proper configuration of such a system has become more involved. Officials must provide not only for the growth in the size and variety of potential threats, but also for the weaknesses resulting from the campuses themselves, emanating from areas of risk such as parking facilities.

Therefore, it is essential that each individual institution undertake a comprehensive survey and study of its own grounds and parking facilities to determine its best course and combinations for mass notification and procedures.

Samuel Shanes is Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of Talk-A-Phone Co. He can be reached at sshanes@talkaphone.com.

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DEATH BY PARKING THE PHANTOM

CHAPTER 2

He Had No Fear...

By JVH



Paul Manning and his 16-year-old son were “staking out” a three-story parking garage that one of Paul Junior’s friends had said was “haunted.” They saw a light, and as they got to the sidewalk at the entrance, they heard a sound that was mindful of machinery working. There was no sound of motors but a clanking like chains being dragged across the floor. Like someone wearing leg irons moving slowly on the second deck. Then Paul Junior grabbed his dad’s arm and pointed up. There was, I kid you not, an apparition walking along. It was bent over and seemed to be dragging one foot. Junior dove behind one bush; his dad took another. ...

There I was, lying on my belly at 10:30 p.m., hiding from a ghost. Oh, come on ... this was ridiculous. I looked over and Paulo was obviously thinking the same thing. He had gotten to his knees and was trying to get a better look at the “thing” walking about the second floor. I was proud of my boy; he had no fear.

It was hard to see what was going on. Of course, it was night, and the garage lights were off. An engine seemed to be running somewhere in the back, and the light that was available was flickering, then getting stronger as the engine sounds increased.

We decided to go back to the car and regroup.

“Come on, Dad, let’s go over and check it out.”

That Paulo ... he always wanted to head straight into the fray. Time to teach him a little finesse.

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“OK, OK. We can do that. But it might be better to see if we can figure out what we are dealing with. Tell you what. Let’s go around to the side where that stairwell is and see if we can get a better idea of what we’re dealing with before we simply walk in and make complete fools of ourselves.”

I could tell Paulo wasn’t buying it, but he said nothing. We quietly walked around to the side of the building, found the open stairwell, and crept up to the second deck. Paulo was kneeling in front of me as I slowly opened the door.

Naturally, it hadn’t been oiled in years and sounded like we were entering the dungeon in Dracula’s castle. This just couldn’t get any weirder.

Paulo stuck his head around the door and said, “Dad, they are loading some stuff into the back of a truck and leaving. Let’s go get ‘em.”

“Get ‘em” – he had been watching too much television.

We weren’t armed. Who knew what they had. Plus, I had a 16-year-old boy with me. I pulled him back into the stairs

He began to laugh. He was almost in tears when he got control of himself ...

and listened as the truck drove out of the lot. We ran to the edge of the deck and watched it move at a very unconcerned pace down the street.

“Damn,” I said. “Looks like we missed them.”

“Well, maybe so,” said Paulo, “but I got their license number. Now maybe Uncle Bill at the LAPD can help.”

What a kid. He has my genes. As we walked out of the garage, we got the name of the owner off the side of the booth. S and J Investments. The address was in the Olympic and Bundy towers just around the corner.

I let him call Bill Vose. I figured he wouldn’t hang up quite so quickly on his “nephew.” Sure enough, Paulo came into my office the next afternoon with a big smile on his face.

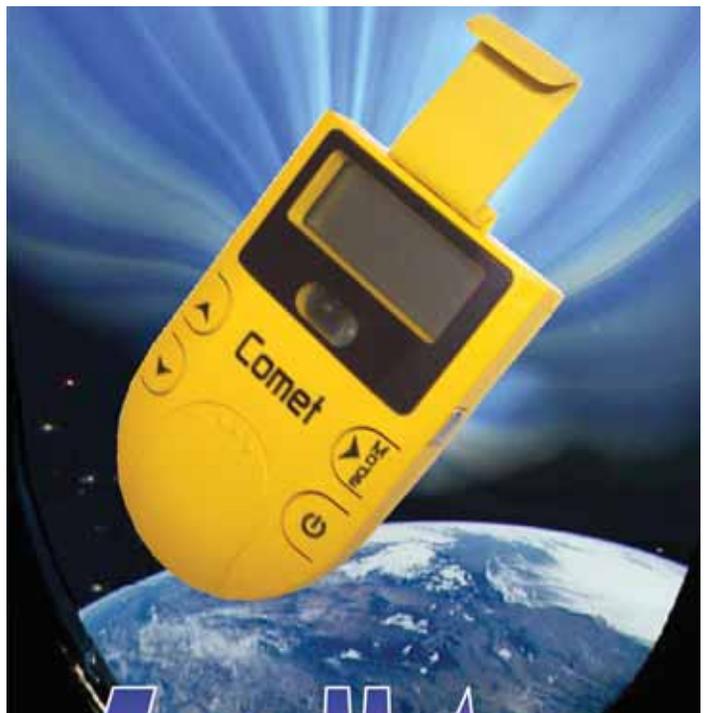
“Uncle Bill said I should tell you that I don’t have a PI license and shouldn’t be out sneaking around garages in the middle of the night. Then he gave me the registered owner of the truck, and told me to tell you that you owed him a bottle of 20-year-old Glenfiddich.”

Wow, running that license plate was expensive – that’s over 70 bucks.

Yes, I admit it, I’m a whisky fan. That’s Scotch whisky to you. And, in my case, single malt. I love the rich peaty taste of an Islay malt. I had been working Bill for years to wean him off that sweet bourbon swill he drank. Glenfiddich is a mild single malt, and a good choice for the novice. But a bottle of 20-year-old ... “So,” I asked Paulo, “where would you say we go from here?”

“The truck is registered to a rental company near the airport. We could go ask who rented it and then ask them what

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Death by Parking – The Phantom

from Page 43

the heck they were doing at the garage.”

OK, it was time to introduce Paulo to the economics of the PI business. We had no client. No one was paying us to do this, and I doubted that Billy, his school friend, was going to pony up \$75 an hour plus expenses to find out that his “ghost” was a couple of guys in a truck. I explained this to Paulo.

“Dad, why don’t we go to the owner and tell him someone was messing around in his garage? He would hire us to find out who was doing what and solve the case.”

OK, not bad thinking. The kid had a head for the business.

The next afternoon, we were sitting in front of Ray Schumer, the “S” of “S and J Investments.” I told him I was a PI and my son had noticed something at his garage around the corner. We thought we should discuss it with him.

He was a great guy and smiled at Paulo. “OK, son, tell me the story.”

When Paulo finished, Schumer began to laugh. He was almost in tears when he got control of himself. He rummaged through his desk and came up with a business card. He handed me the card.

“Deswal Consulting – Garage Restorations”

Huh? What did a consulting firm have to do with sounds and lights in a parking garage late at night? Schumer thought it was funny; I was confused, and just a little pissed off. He was laughing at my son, and no one – I mean, no one – laughs at my son.

I was just about to give Schumer a piece of my mind when his assistant walked into the office and said: “Sorry to interrupt, Ray, but we have a problem.”

“They found a body in the shrubbery next to the garage on Le Grand. It was one of the crew from the restoration firm. He was shot.”

“Well, Manning, I may need your services after all.”

To be continued ...

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CASE STUDY:

Huge Entrance Back Ups Cause Pain for Popular Zoo

BY JOHN VAN HORN

Toronto Zoo calls itself Canada's premier zoo; it's a favorite stop for more than 1.2 million visitors a year. Its popularity translates into a very busy parking operation, with more than 250,000 vehicles using the zoo's surface lots each year.

The Problem

Peak attendance days, such as holidays or special event weekends, taxed the throughput of the zoo's previous pay-on-entry scheme. This resulted in long lines of vehicles queuing at each of the zoo's four entry lanes.

Additionally, auditing the parking revenue was a challenge as the entering vehicles were a mix of prepaid members and cash-paying day visitors.

In order to alleviate the long entry lines and increase audit control, Toronto Zoo released a public tender to provide a free entry parking system that will allow users to pay for their parking at the main pedestrian admission gate. On payment for parking, the zoo wanted to present visitors with a reusable validation that would be collected as proof of payment at the unattended exit.

Additional requirements included the need for this validation to be waterproof. This was driven by the fact that many visitors took the time to enjoy the zoo's water park, which resulted in visitors often getting very wet.

A traditional token system was not specified. It didn't have a strong audit facility and did not meet the technology requirement of the zoo.

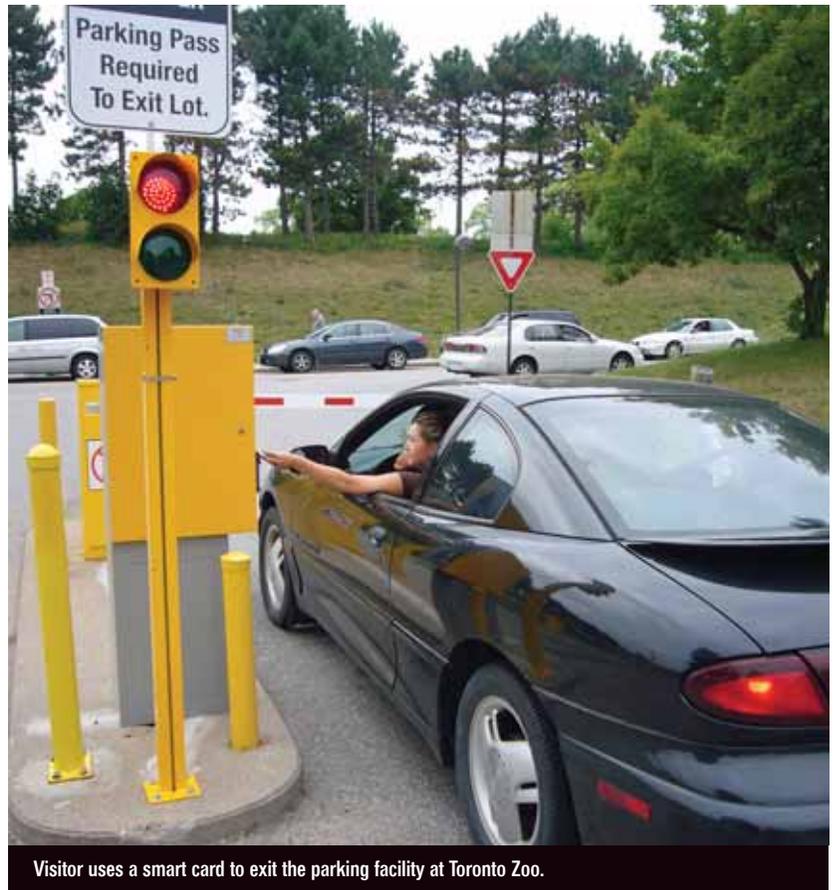
The Solution

The winning tender submission resulted in the installation of the first smart card system in Greater Toronto and the largest parking application in North America. Barrier gates were installed in a free running mode in each of the zoo's four entry lanes. This permitted visitors quick entry while preventing unpaid exit from these lanes.

Each admissions cashier is equipped with an off-line smart card validator that is used to provide a quick validated plastic smart card to each guest who pays for parking. The zoo's existing POS system – in combination with a count of cards distributed with each cashier till – provides the required audit control.

The guest is asked if they park in the zoo's lot and, if so, they are charged for the parking in addition to their entrance and issued a validated exit smart card.

There is a second "class" of parker, a Toronto Zoo member. With an annual membership, they received a parking pass that



Visitor uses a smart card to exit the parking facility at Toronto Zoo.

allows them one exit per day. There are more than 35,000 members, each having parking privileges.

In the exit lanes, the driver inserts the validated parking smart card in the SCS exit lane terminal, triggering the gate to rise, allowing exit. Zoo members with prepaid parking passes are able to use their pre-issued smart card in the provided contactless readers to exit.

At the end of each day, staff retrieves the collected smart cards from the SCS exit terminals for redistribution to the cashiers for the next day.

The Result

Lines on entry disappeared, as did cashiers standing in the lanes wearing aprons and handling thousands of dollars in cash daily. Parking revenues were auditable (and increased), and visitors and members alike were able to quickly and conveniently leave the parking area without noticeable waits or long lines.

The installation was done by Canadian Parking Equipment/American Parking Equipment (www.cpeape.com) from their offices in Toronto.

PT

NOTES FROM BIG BEN ...

Goodbye, Mr. President

BY PETER GUEST

Anyone who bothers to read this column will probably have noticed that I was President of the British Parking Association for a while. I am quite proud of this (English understatement here) because (a) I got elected and (b) people were actually a bit deferential, which means that the post, if not the holder, means something, which is good for our industry.

In many ways it was “spot the president,” because my term of office managed to coincide with me spending a large chunk of my life in Abu Dhabi to get the largest parking proj-



Incoming British Parking Association President Les Knight (left) poses with PT Editor John Van Horn and outgoing president Peter Guest on the shores of the Thames outside the Houses of Parliament. The BPA held a “hail and farewell” reception for the two at the fabled building in early July. Anglophiles will recognize the “London Eye” in the background.

ect in the world started. The bids are in, but more on this later.

However, we got a few things moving in the motherland, not least of which is the Institute of Parking Professionals, where people in our industry now, for the first time, have their own professional body and commitment to develop a training program for all levels. My desire is to see the first people who get a “bachelor’s of parking.”

With the end of my term I now move to having the elder statesman title of Past-President – or as one colleague insists, Has-Been President.

Ah, yes, Tenders and Bidders

Maybe we dispensed with torture as a workplace tool too soon. We are the consultants, we spend months

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nt, and Other Sorrows

working to get the client to decide what he wants, we write it down, we check it, and we even produce a look-up table so you don't miss any of the requirements. You're the bidder; you ignore the look-up table, you tell us in great detail how you will install the meters (which ignore 10 features that we do want and offer five that we have excluded), but you don't offer the required maintenance.

The tender says you will be paid for the meter when it is commissioned; you write down that you will be paid when it's delivered – do you understand the difference? We ask you to have the equipment certified for local environmental conditions; you send us certificates that show that it works fine in northern Europe. Hello! – it gets quite hot here in Abu Dhabi because in mid-summer, we are nearer the sun than Berlin.

Finally, we ask you to explain in detail how you quality assure what you do over the next seven years; you send us a certificate that says your company is ISO 9001 accredited to install condom vending machines in Kalamazoo. Then you get really upset when you're not short-listed. Give me strength!

The Good Old Days

I saw a report from a local council here in the UK where the treasurer was wondering if he should do anything about the way the council collected the meter money. Apparently, two guys (the same two every time) go out in a car and open the pay-and-display meters and tip the money in the cash box into a bag in the boot (sorry, trunk) of the car. All the money goes into the same bag, which is taken back to the office where it is counted (same people all the time), and it's coming up short. One day they lost \$2,000. The treasurer's idea was to get both guys to sign the collection paper; that should solve the problem!

A lawyer in the UK is fighting a parking ticket through the courts. He parks his motorcycle outside his house every day and gets a ticket. He argues that since the machine is on a stand and the wheels don't touch the ground, it is not on the highway, so

it's not parked, so he is home free. OK, smart arse, so you're not parked and you miss a \$150 fine; how about the local cops arrest you for obstructing the highway? I always feel that a criminal conviction looks so good on a lawyer's resume.

Differentials

A lot of people here are talking about how instead of a "one size fits all" parking philosophy, we should introduce more differentials into the way we do parking. The two main ideas are that (a) we should fine people more who park in a no-parking area than those who offend at a meter and (b) we should get people to pay more for parking a high-polluting vehicle than the guy in his Prius.

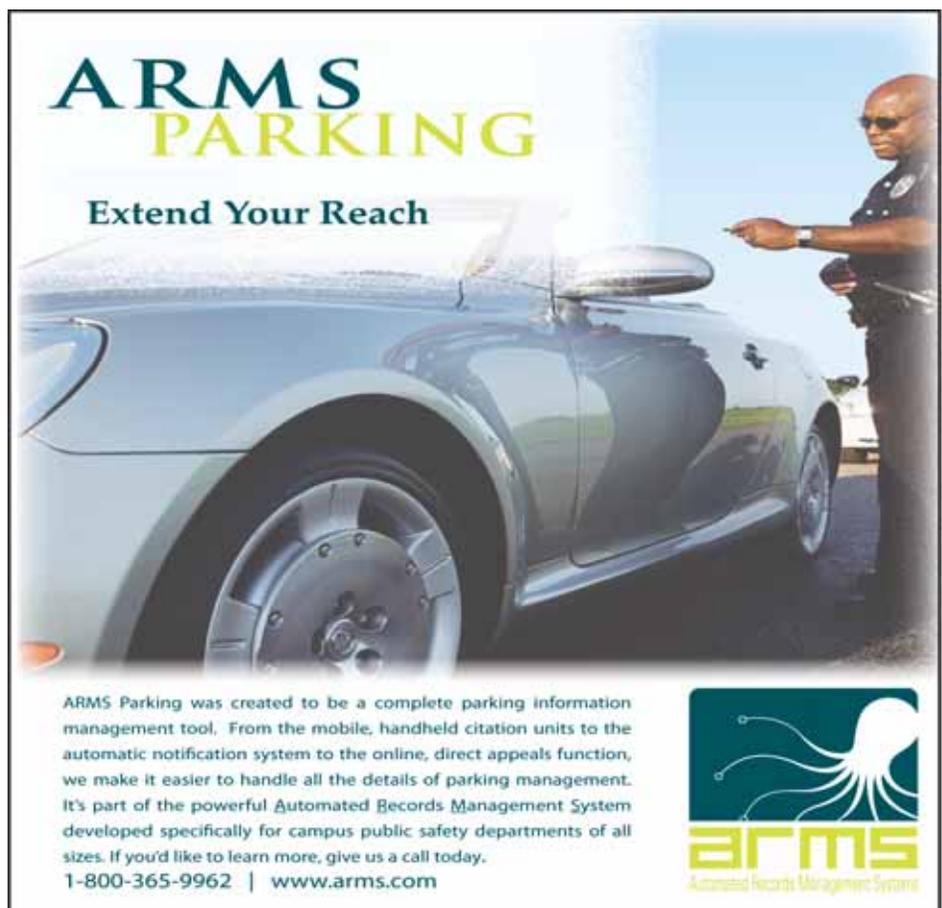
I can understand the fine thing up to a point: If you park where it's banned, you potentially cause a bigger problem than if you park where it's allowed but break the

rules. However, I think this breaks down with the hard-core offender in a busy city street. If someone has decided to park illegally, are they going to park where they risk a \$100 fine or somewhere where they risk a \$200 fine? No contest. If the streets busy and they take a meter, this then increases the chance that the honest guy will be forced to the no-parking area or to drive away.

Our government has just published new rules to allow a differential fine, and it will be interesting to see whether it makes things better or worse.

The second idea seems a bureaucratic nightmare. The idea seems to be that in order to use the public parking, a driver would register his vehicle with the local council and then pay a charge at the meter, which is set according to the engine size. First, do I have to register my

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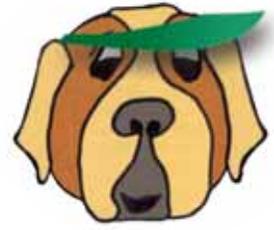
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Credit Cards and a 'Whoops'



I've been thinking a lot about credit card usage and parking. There are a lot of benefits to having your customers use cards. It's fast, it's easy and, of course, you don't have to worry about where the money goes, or do you?

If you are private, my guess is you track the money in the bank closely. You know to the penny how much is put in by each location. However, if you are public, is that really the case?

In most cities, universities and airports, the credit card clearing account usually piggybacks on the account set up by the larger organization. They have a large number of transactions and can probably negotiate a lower discount rate with the credit card company. It makes good sense.

However, it also means that the money generated by the parking operation through credit cards is mixed in with all the other credit card funds coming from fees, licenses, tax payments and the like. I just audited a city where there was no way to tell where the money in the credit card account came from.

A private operator would set up a merchant account for each garage. That way there is an exact accounting of how much money was cleared by each location and the manager can be sure that all the numbers match.

One might say "who cares." In one case, the parking manager told me he simply gave the hospital's accounting department an invoice each month for the amount of credit cards they ran through the parking operation and they transferred that much into his account.

"Didn't anyone ever wonder how you came up with the



number you gave them every month?" His response was expected: "No one ever asked."

Accounting for credit card funds is important. What if someone gets their bill and forgets they parked in the garage? The bill from the credit card company says "City of Suchensuch." It's now five weeks later. He's forgotten he was ever in Suchensuch and tells the credit card company to deny the charge. The bank sends a notice to the city. Now what? How does the city get its money back from the garage? Most likely they don't. After all, they say, it's all the same organization, just a different pocket.

Continued on Page 50



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