

Parking guidance

Why should we think about parking?

Parking is something that all our campuses have, but many don't think about often. But as fiscal and facilities pressures mount, it's worth thinking about the need for, and configuration of, parking on our campuses.

At most of our campuses, parking is a "bundled" cost — students don't directly see the cost of parking, but instead pay for it indirectly through tuition. In this way, students, staff, and faculty who don't park on campus effectively subsidize those who do.

Costs of parking

Parking takes up a lot of campus space — space that typically does not produce much revenue on its own, or directly serve academic purposes. And parking is expensive: in addition to construction costs, parking has ongoing operating and maintenance costs for pavement, landscaping, snow removal, stormwater management, and sometimes security. Within the Minnesota State system, recent parking ramps in the Twin Cities metropolitan area have cost upwards of \$20,000 per parking stall, while new paved parking lots cost more than \$3,000 per stall to construct and take up around 400 square feet of space. There's an expectation at most campuses that surface parking for students will be free and readily available at all times of day, leading to parking counts that may be detrimental to campus finances and aesthetics.

In addition to the construction, operations, and maintenance costs of parking, there are environmental and social costs. Encouraging all students and staff to drive to campus leads to increased emissions and traffic congestion from vehicles and potential difficulties for pedestrians and bicyclists, who may not be provided the infrastructure they need to safely access campus. A campus that is surrounded by parking lots may suffer from an unfriendly perception by visitors.

Right-sizing parking

When campuses are able to right-size their parking, they benefit by reducing all these costs and having more available land for academic or landscaping uses.

We strongly encourage campuses to conduct a parking study during the Comprehensive Facilities Planning process or when the campus plans to expand or renovate parking areas. There are a number of factors to consider during a parking study:

- What proportion of students, staff, and faculty currently park on campus?
- If the campus has residence halls, what percentage of residents keep vehicles on campus?
- Do students, staff, and faculty pay directly for parking, or is it "free"?

- How is existing parking on campus utilized? Are there times of day when parking is scarce? How is event parking handled?
 - ◊ The campus may wish to directly measure parking utilization at different times of day during the academic year.
- If the local municipality has regulations concerning the number of off-street parking spaces required, does the campus currently comply with those regulations? Could the campus reduce its parking count and still comply with local code?
 - ◊ The City of St. Paul’s municipal code dictates that minimum parking for a higher education campus dictates a minimum of “1 space per every 2 employees and 1 per every 3 full-time students not on campus or 1 for every 3 part-time students, whichever is greater, plus required parking for other uses”.
 - ◊ The City of Minneapolis lists a minimum parking requirement of “Not less than 1 space per classroom and + 1 space per five (5) students based on the maximum number of students attending classes at any one (1) time” and a *maximum* of “Not more than 1 space per classroom and other rooms used by students and faculty + 1 space per 3 students based on the maximum number of students attending classes at any one (1) time”. However, these parking requirements may not accurately reflect the minimum amount of parking needed by a campus to adequately serve demand.
- How much visitor parking is available, and how much is typically needed?
- How does the daily/weekly class schedule affect parking demand? When does peak demand occur?
 - ◊ Consult class scheduling and event data for the previous academic year.
- Given enrollment trends and predictions, how much parking will be needed in the future?
- What, if any, public transit or other travel modes are available? What percentage of students, staff, and faculty use these modes? What incentives would motivate more people to use alternative modes?
- A survey of commuters (and residents, if applicable) may be helpful in determining parking demand and travel mode share.

Parking Demand Management

If the campus decides to reduce or restrict the amount of parking on campus, there are a number of ways to affect demand:

1. *Increased transit:* If there is public transit available, how often does it stop on/near campus? Does it serve locations where students, staff, and faculty live?
 - ◊ Discounted or subsidized transit passes are an effective way to reduce parking on campus.
 - ◊ If the local transit does not serve the campus well, is the transit authority amenable to changing its routes and headways to better serve campus?
2. *Parking cash-out:* If commuters are not currently charged for parking, the campus could offer a cash-out option: Students, staff, and faculty who opt to not park on campus can receive a lump-sum cash “bonus” reflecting the cost of parking they would have used on campus. This requires a permit system for all parkers to ensure that those who take the cash-out don’t continue to park on campus.
3. *Car sharing/rideshare:* In urban areas, rideshare options like Uber and Lyft can provide an occasional transportation option to commuters, especially those who commute via walking or biking. Additionally, car sharing services like Zipcar or Hourcar can provide vehicle access to residential students who do not keep a car on campus.



4. *Charging for parking:* On campuses where parking has been “free”, charging for parking can be controversial. But allowing unlimited parking can contribute to increased demand; by charging for parking (via hourly, daily, or monthly rates), the campus allows commuters to see the full cost of parking and minimize non-parkers’ subsidizing of those who do park on campus.
 - ◇ If the campus does decide to charge for parking, it should discuss the situation with the municipality; if street parking is free and unrestricted near campus, local residents may object to the sudden influx of cars seeking to avoid parking charges. Work with the city to ensure local residents are not negatively impacted by campus commuters.
5. *Shifting class schedules:* If the typical daily schedule for classes clumps most classes during “prime time” (10am-2pm, typically), then parking demand will be highest during this period. By shifting some classes earlier in the morning or later in the afternoon, the campus could spread demand more evenly throughout the day and reduce the maximum number of spaces needed.

Case study: University of Washington

The University of Washington is a large and growing campus in Seattle that has committed to managing its transportation impacts on the local neighborhoods and region through a Transportation Management Plan (TMP). As outlined in the recent Master Plan, the primary goal of the TMP is to “reach a 15% single occupancy vehicle rate by 2028.” The TMP caps the number of parking spaces on campus to 12,300, even as the university’s enrollment grows. According to the Master Plan, this cap “has remained unchanged since 1984.”

As part of its TMP, the university monitors and reports on the campus performance related to its transportation goals, and regularly surveys campus commuters. The TMP uses eight strategies to manage parking demand on campus:

1. U-PASS Program (transit passes)
2. Transit
3. Shared-use transportation
4. Parking management
5. Bicycle
6. Pedestrian
7. Marketing and education
8. Institutional policies

Of these strategies, the U-PASS program has been most effective in reducing parking demand. The university works with local transit agencies to price the U-PASS effectively and enhance transit service to the campus and surrounding neighborhoods.



Paid parking is another critical tool the university uses to reduce demand and fund alternatives like the U-PASS. Higher-demand parking spaces cost more, encouraging parking at less-popular locations. As a result of these strategies, the university has a very low drive-alone rate for students and employees when compared to similar institutions.

References

Shoup, Donald. *The High Cost of Free Parking*. Chicago: American Planning Association Planners Press, 2005.

University of Washington. *2018 Seattle Campus Master Plan*, July 2017.

