

National Association of College Auxiliary Services ♦ 43

## About Texas A&M University

Texas A&M University is a land-grant, sea-grant and space-grant institution located in College Station, Texas. The university is equidistant from Houston, Dallas, San Antonio and Austin. Enrollment includes approximately 44,000 students studying for degrees in 10 academic colleges.

### Our Mission

Texas A&M University is dedicated to the discovery, development, communication, and application of knowledge in a wide range of academic and professional fields. Its mission of providing the highest quality undergraduate and graduate programs is inseparable from its mission of developing new understandings through research and creativity. It prepares students to assume roles of leadership, responsibility, and service to society. Texas A&M assumes as its historic trust the maintenance of freedom of inquiry and an intellectual environment nurturing the human mind and spirit. It welcomes and seeks to serve persons of all racial, ethnic, and geographic groups, women and men alike, as it addresses the needs of an increasingly diverse population and a global economy. In the twenty-first century, Texas A&M University seeks to assume a place of preeminence among public universities while respecting its history and traditions.

### History

Texas A&M, the state's first public institution of higher education, was opened on Oct. 4, 1876 as the Agricultural & Mechanical College of Texas. The school owes its origin to the Morrill Act of 1862, which established the nation's land-grant college system.

In 1963, the name of the institution was changed to Texas A&M University to more accurately reflect its expanding role as a leader in teaching, research and public service for the state, nation and world. The initials "A" and "M" are a link to the university's past; they no longer represent any specific words as the school's curriculum has grown to include not only agriculture and engineering, but architecture, business, education, geosciences, liberal arts, medicine, science and veterinary medicine.

# Tight Turnaround on a Big Campus

## Texas A&M University Campus Plans to Tackle Parking Issues Using Technology

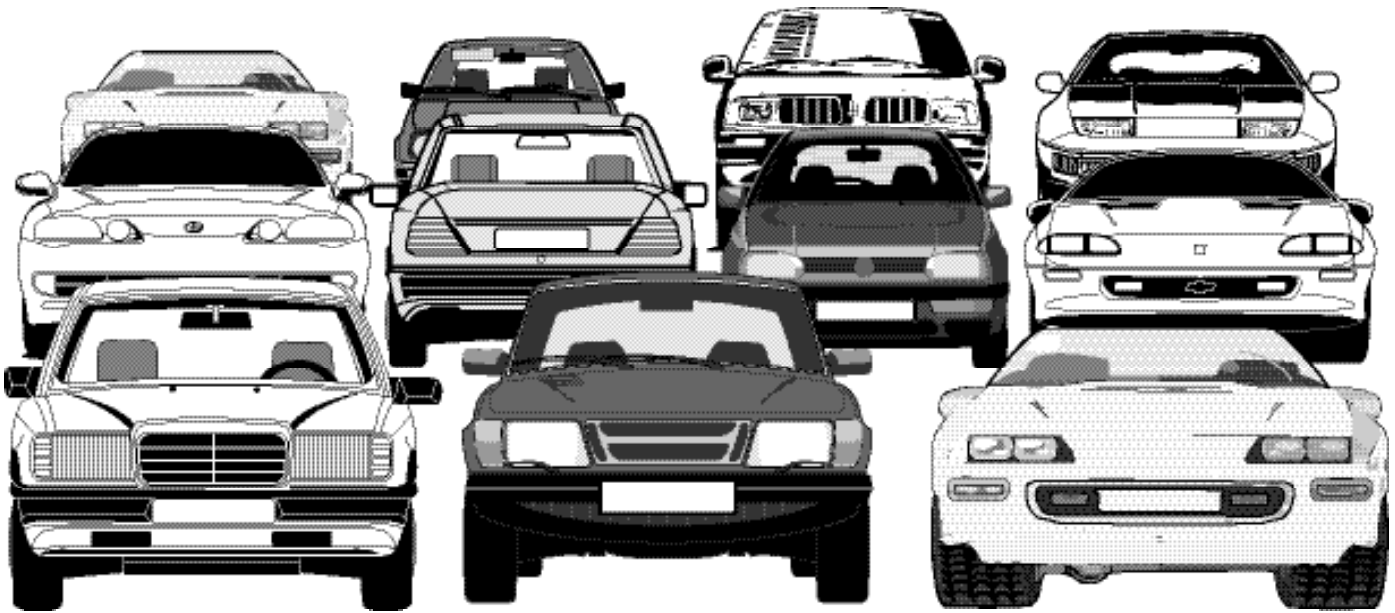
by

Rod Weis

Texas is well known for its "wide open spaces." And it's true that we have more square miles of land (that is land that isn't covered by ice and snow) than any of our forty-nine sister states. Unfortunately, all that space does not alleviate the problem of finding a parking spot on campus. When you compete daily with 45,000 students and 12,000 staff – all trying to park and get to class on time – you are bound to have problems, especially if you're managing the system with an outdated process.

But if you are given the privilege to be Texas A&M University's Director of Transportation Services, you are expected to be up for the challenge. Having managed transportation and parking at both Georgia Tech and the University of Illinois, I came to Texas A&M with some experience and an eagerness to tackle the challenge of improving the University's parking operations.

I am fortunate to have joined the University under a president who is looking to make positive changes across the board. The president of Texas A&M has made a commitment to the State of Texas, its legislature and the taxpayers. He is committed to further strengthening pro-



grams that are already strong and managing resources efficiently. He has indicated that some programs that are weak or that do not serve the state will be eliminated. Accordingly, he has asked all departments to examine their operations in terms of efficiency and look at ways to save money so the limited resources can be used where they are needed and can do the most good.

At Texas A&M, my major concern has been with managing campus space efficiently rather than acquiring more of it. We have enough parking but it has just not been managed as efficiently as I and others believe it could be. My number one priority is communicating information to our customers about changes needed, simplifying processes, and helping them make the most of their time. That just isn't happening with the current system.

We have about 34,000 parking spaces including four existing garages, a new 3,800-space garage that opened in August, and a new pedestrian passageway that connects the garage to the main campus area. While the students will appreciate the new spaces, the project represents a substantial investment of \$50 million, and we can't afford to keep building as the campus grows and enrollment increases. As we lose surface

lots to office and classroom development, we need to operate the remaining space more efficiently.

In addition to parking, the department manages transit services, fleet services and traffic services. So we are also looking for a solution that would save time and streamline operations.

Most people do not realize that we spend about 75,000 hours a year directing traffic and run 175,000 hours of transit service. The people who complain about the one parking ticket they receive do not stop to realize that Transportation Services has an enormous area of responsibility.

I will continue meeting with supervisors and managers to evaluate all current policies, procedures and regulations to gain as much efficiency as possible. We realize there are many inefficiencies in our system, including untraceable, unpaid citations. Unfortunately, these translate to higher permit fees, which has a negative

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impact when hiring faculty and attracting students. We knew it was time to make some adjustments.

The solution that we found to address our concerns was provided by T2 Systems technology. The company has a product they call *PowerPark* which has a web

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interface that allows customers to be able to make their own decisions without the necessity of having to go through someone in the office. They will soon be able to log on and view their account with ease, register for permits, pay

citations, change wait-list preferences, and access a host of other services. This is a huge benefit because it saves time and hassle for everyone. In my experience, if they have the information they need at their fingertips, customers are more content with the services they are paying for.

*PowerPark* also provides a better way for Texas A&M to track and process campus tickets, an important feature when you process close to 10,000 a year.

We will be able to notify people about their citations immediately. It now takes us a week to six months to identify a car. By that time, some students have already graduated and moved on. And if they were still around, many would simply deny the ticket. With the full implementation of this system, the identifica-

tion and notification processes will be automated. Also, they get an email notification the day of the citation. Students are going through the lines faster. Citations are being processed quickly and successfully.

What are the long-term benefits of a more effective parking system? And what made university administration see the value of new technology? Improved customer service and the opportunity to save money on staffing is a big part of it. A credible, cost-saving solution that will alleviate the need to create more space in response to rising student numbers is what we are seeking.

When I arrived on campus, the parking image was a negative one. Part of that was due to inefficiencies in the system we were using. We did not have correct information, or all the information we needed to make good consistent decisions. Our employees appeared as if they did not know what they were doing – when, in fact, they are highly competent, helpful and customer service-minded employees. They simply needed information. Without it, they were at a disadvantage. As any experienced manager knows, without solid, reliable information, it is impossible to provide good customer service.

Another benefit of the new system is that it allows the department to easily view staffing levels. Do we really need 140 people to operate this department? If customers are able to get most of their services through an automated process online, we can hire fewer employees or redirect those employees to tasks that require human interaction. This enhances our service level because the system now handles tasks so employees can take care of customers.

We also believe the system will help us to continually evaluate the efficiency and value of the University's transportation and parking programs and services.



In addition to gaining the support of the University's administration, we knew getting support from the community was critical. We have set up an implementation team to educate everyone about the new system, where we are, and what we want to accomplish. In other words, we are changing our marketing and communication efforts to enhance our image and make our customers aware of the great changes we have in store for them.

The department will hold presentations for anyone on campus who is willing to listen. To support this effort, the University has changed the name of the department, developed a new logo and promoted outside activities. There are many good things Transportation Services does for the campus of which the public is unaware. That is why we are out there spreading the word. I am not naïve enough to think everyone is going to love us three years from now but they can certainly respect us and know we are doing the best with the resources we have available.

We believe *PowerPark* will simplify processes and improve customer focus – two areas that are very important to Texas A&M's president, as well as the campus community.

We have about thirty-five years of accumulated citation exceptions associated with our former system. We do not need parking by exception – it takes up about 95 percent of our time, and we need to devote more time to the fleet and transit side of the department. The new system saves time and effort. It allows us to carefully examine every single thing we do and then intelligently question each action. If there is no value added because of the process, we develop alternatives that enhance our efficiency and enhance our customer service. We also believe the system will help us to continually evaluate the efficiency and value of the University's transportation and parking programs and services. The technology will give us the option to pull a report at any time and answer questions about the state of parking on campus.

A decade ago, universities saw few alternatives to building spaces to satisfy the needs of an increasingly larger and more mobile campus community. Today, it is far too costly to build garages or make mistakes in planning new facilities. Administrators have to be right when making a major decision. They have to be able to go into a meeting and make a cogent and valid



argument and be able to explain what they did and why, they did it.

At this point, our team is well on its way toward improving the parking situation and image at Texas A&M. *PowerPark* has helped us to manage our facilities with much greater efficiency and we expect continuing good results. From my experience, if you improve efficiency, you have better visitor parking relations and are less likely to be required to build more parking spaces. By turning over your spaces faster, you are managing existing space better. That is the difference – and that is a big difference in Texas. ♦



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tor of campus parking and as an associate director for project planning and facilities management at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. Rod also worked as operations director for the Lexington Kentucky Transit Authority and the Ames Transit Agency in Ames, Iowa.

He earned a BS in community and regional planning from Iowa State University and a MBA at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign.

Rod is a recognized leader in the parking and transportation industry, serving on the International Parking Institute's Board of Advisors, and is a member of NACAS, and the Association for Commuter Transportation and other professional associations.

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