



The August issue of *The Parking Professional* featured a column about the Federal Highway Administration’s white paper, *Contemporary Approaches to Parking Pricing: A Primer* (see p. 46 in that issue), which was presented at the 2012 IPI Conference & Expo. The paper’s stated purpose is to “encourage discussion and innovation within the parking field.” We welcome this input, as discussion and innovation have been significant hallmarks of the parking industry for a long time.

The International Parking Institute (IPI) was founded in 1962 precisely so parking professionals could come together, share ideas, and advance the industry. This strong tradition of professional dialogue is confirmed by the many state and regional parking associations and the growth of parking organizations, conferences, and publications worldwide.

Many who read this are of an age to appreciate how our industry changed with the introduction of computerized ticket processing systems, electronic meters, handheld ticketwriters, and pay-on-foot machines. However, the relatively recent introduction of cell phone/smartphone, remote sensing, and new lighting technologies may indeed be the biggest changes to the industry yet.

Why and how parking managers choose to apply these new technologies to improve customer convenience and enhance parking and traffic management in the future will certainly benefit from professional exchanges and consulting input early in the process. This will help to avoid mistakes, pitfalls, and unintended consequences down the road.

For instance, cell phone payment technology provides the ability to extend on-street parking durations, but is curb turnover truly served as a result? Likewise, could pricing on-street parking to achieve a desired occupancy rate ultimately be counterproductive to merchants, who desire convenient and economically priced short-term parking for their customers? Also, while directed enforcement focusing on high-violation areas is another new possibility, would its practice divert attention to an underlying problem of improperly regulated streets?

In light of the above cautions, and as our industry continues to apply emerging technologies (as it always has), I invite on-street parking managers to consider the following questions and suggestions before applying any new technology:

- Do you know your parking activity indicators? Are you spending enough time in the field? Have you dedicated staff to collecting and analyzing parking activity, ticket processing, and collection data? Have you actually collected parking data yourself, even the old fashioned way—with paper and pencil? These indicators are the blood pressure, pulse, and temperature of your parking management program.
- Once you can answer “yes” to the above questions, determine which indicators to use before implementing something new. If you lack knowledge of your system’s performance before implementation, how will you know the true value and effectiveness of a new technology?
- If you think defining success as achieving a desired meter occupancy rate is sufficient, you’re wrong. Parking turnover and duration indicators are equally important, and the percent of optimum meter turnover is essential.
- Are you measuring parking safety and service zone performance in your data collection process? These indicators expose the public safety and economic development conditions (for better or worse) affected by your program.
- Never forget: any one indicator examined apart from the others does not tell the whole story. Assessing each indicator in light of the others and versus industry norms will never steer you wrong.
- Never confuse measures of operational efficiency (tickets per officer and capture rates) with those of program effectiveness (turnover, compliance, and availability).
- Finally, listen to your parking customers! They could know more about their parking problems and possible solutions than you think.

For more information on parking industry norms and data collection, refer to Chapter 4, *Parking Surveys* of IPI’s *Parking 101—A Parking Primer*. **P**



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