

PARKING ADDICTION



By Suzanne Williams

Addicted to adding parking facilities? A recovering addict offers 12 steps to recovery.

POLITICS ONYMIOUS

Parking professionals come into contact with parkaholics every day—you probably recognize them as pesky repeat offenders who refuse to follow the rules. But how many of us are willing to admit we may have a problem ourselves? If your operation is struggling to manage peak demand and you're considering building a new structure or lot to accommodate more vehicles, you may be a parkaholic: someone addicted to the lure of abundant, convenient parking.

My colleagues and I at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro (UNCG) have been addicted to parking for decades. Located on 200+ landlocked pedestrian-friendly acres about two miles west of downtown Greensboro, UNCG is a compact, densely-configured campus. Student enrollment tops 18,000 and we employ more than 3,000 faculty and staff. Despite recruiting the most diverse student body in the UNC system, all our students share one commonality: even freshmen are allowed to bring cars to campus.

On a typical day, approximately 20,000 people (students, employees, and visitors) are accommodated with fewer than 7,000 parking spaces. The UNCG Parking Operations & Campus Access Management (POCAM) department oversees three parking decks and an underground garage. Most surface lots are around the perimeter of campus or in remote areas accessible by bus. Our park and ride lot is less than one mile from campus and is shared with the Greensboro Coliseum Complex. Though the campus is surrounded by established neighborhoods and restricted by railroad tracks, a pedestrian underpass soon will connect a new mixed-use village south of the campus core.

For years, we struggled to manage our scarce parking resources as efficiently and effectively as possible while enrollments grew and parking inventory shrank due to the construction of new classroom and residential buildings. Our recovery from parking addiction began in 2005, which was the year we asked ourselves if we really needed to build and finance yet another parking deck. On the road to recovery, we've developed a 12-step strategic planning process that can be applied to parking operations at airports, municipalities, and universities alike.

The 12 Steps

- **Step 1: Assess** current conditions. Review standard operating procedures and streamline where possible. Conduct a SWOT analysis to determine organizational strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. What data is readily available? What additional data is needed? Determine effective parking capacity and identify peak demand for it. Geo-code drivers to discover travel patterns. Study best practices in parking and transportation to develop benchmarking targets. Consider various transportation demand management



(TDM) strategies to reduce and redistribute parking demand.

- **Step 2: Believe** you can overcome parking challenges. If you're unsure, give yourself an attitude adjustment. Be aware of the negative, but focus on the positive outcome you want to achieve. Look beyond the limits of parking to explore multi-modal sustainable transportation options such as bicycles, buses, car-sharing, ride-sharing, vanpools, and walking.
- **Step 3: Decide** to take action and envision the future you want to create. Fine-tune mission and vision statements, create a one-word mantra to help you stay focused, and define core values as guiding principles. Our mantra is access—not parking or enforcement or even revenue, but access! Safety, sustainability, efficiency, effectiveness, consistency, and transparency are among our core values.
- **Step 4: Conduct an inventory** of parking and sustainable transportation resources currently available as well as additional resources you may want to acquire. Get to know your staff and help them explore training and professional development opportunities. Update your inventory of available parking spaces, equipment, signage, etc. What bus and transit services are available? Where are bicycles, motorcycles, and mopeds parked? Are there any bike shops nearby? How many people carpool or vanpool? How do drivers and riders find each other? Is there a car-sharing option such as Zipcar or WeCar? How about emergency ride home?
- **Step 5: Develop a plan** to implement changes systematically over time. Set goals and measurable objectives for your plan, and be sure to include a blueprint for implementation as well as evaluation so you can track successes along the way. Prioritize efforts based on resource availability, ease of implementation, and budget.
- **Step 6: Make a list** of stakeholders. Students are our primary focus, just as customers are in a business environment. Faculty, staff, and administrators are our internal customers. We reach out to alumni, parents, visitors, trustees, event planners, project managers, contractors, and vendors. Town-and-gown relationships with neighborhoods surrounding campus are very important. Networking extends to include parking and transportation operations beyond campus as well as local nonprofit Bicycling in Greensboro (BIG), the League of American Bicyclists, and the National Center for Transit Research. All these stakeholders are great resources for information and collaboration.
- **Step 7: Make direct contact** with stakeholders and nurture relationships. Large town hall-style meetings are a way to solicit

input from and share information with large groups. Smaller focus groups are a better way to connect with specific segmented target markets such as bicyclists or carpoolers. Email communications and social networking tools can be effective, especially when combined with web content, printed materials, and a call to action. Our website features time-sensitive parking and transportation updates posted through Facebook and Twitter feeds. Our call to action is our Campus Transportation Challenge, which contributes to Piedmont Authority for Regional Transportation's (PART's) annual Triad Commute Challenge. Participants pledge to try a form of sustainable transportation (bike, bus, carpool, or walk) at least once instead of driving alone, in exchange for a small giveaway and a chance to win larger prizes. Roughly half of all pledges collected throughout PART's 10-county service area come from UNCG students and employees.

- **Step 8: Admit to others** the exact nature of your plan. Communicate to educate! Participate in new student and employee orientation sessions, department meetings, professional development seminars, stakeholder gatherings, and information fairs. Consider a signature event to kick off a transportation challenge or other call to action.
- **Step 9: Humbly vet** your plan and ask for feedback from both internal and external audiences. Be an active listener. Really hear what your stakeholders tell you and take note of what they are saying. Some may be excited about public transit while others may prefer bicycling. Engage your stakeholders and listen to them as much, as if not more than, you talk. Be open to gaining valuable insight from the people around you.
- **Step 10: Make adjustments** as needed. Continually assess and update your TDM plan to make improvements. As you learn about new resources and emerging technologies, incorporate components that will enhance your operations and programs. UNCG's TDM plan continues to evolve:
 - **2005**
Initiated planning process.
 - **2006**
Published UNCG Transportation Master Plan, collaborated with Greensboro Transit Authority (GTA) to launch fare-free Higher Education Area Transit (HEAT) bus service.
 - **2007**
Developed online campus carpool club.
 - **2008**
Published UNCG Bicycle Master Plan.
 - **2009**
Networked with PART for additional commuter benefits including emergency ride home.
 - **2010**
Upgraded rideshare matching registry to Zimride; introduced Zipcar car sharing to campus; became first employer in North Carolina Triad region to receive national recognition as a Best Workplace for Commuters.
 - **2011**
Became the first campus in North Carolina recognized as a Bicycle Friendly University; one of only six universities in the country to receive a gold medal in the Best Workplace for Commuters 2011 Race to Excellence.

• **2012**

Collaborated on the development of a campus climate action plan to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050.

- **Step 11: Seek to improve** understanding and facilitate change through effective communication and marketing. In the UNCG Bryan School of Business and economics, we refer to the Five Ps of Marketing: people, product, price, place (or physical distribution), and promotion. Get to know the people involved by building relationships to better understand what they value and what messages will resonate with them—saving money and/or time, for example. Know what parking and transportation products are available (parking lots, decks, bike racks, bus routes, carpools, carsharing, etc.) and what costs are associated with each. Know from where drivers are traveling, where bus stops are located, and where parking is available. Use this knowledge to promote a combination of options.
- **Step 12: Practice these principles** and share your experience with others. After trying sustainable transportation for yourself, encourage friends and coworkers to join you. To have a more profound effect, help your organization create a multi-modal TDM plan. Following these 12 steps will help you get started.

It Worked for Us

UNCG's efforts to support bicycling, busing, carpooling, car-sharing, and walking are already showing a return on investment. By spending a comparatively small amount of money on sustainable transportation, we've avoided the higher cost of constructing (and financing and maintaining) more parking structures. More people are riding bikes and joining carpools while bus ridership has grown from 50,000 to more than 500,000 rides annually. And while enrollments have increased, effective parking capacity during peak demand has eased from 95 percent to a less stressful and more manageable 86 percent.

A changing campus environment leads to changes in behavior and expectations. By discouraging the use of single-occupancy vehicles, traffic is calmed and pedestrian safety is enhanced. Although some parking spaces in the heart of campus have been replaced by buildings and green spaces, value has been added to every parking permit sold because drivers can more easily locate available parking spaces around the perimeter of a more walkable campus. At UNCG, we've learned that multi-modal sustainable transportation is the key to safe and efficient campus access. It's no longer just about parking.



SUZANNE WILLIAMS is assistant director of campus access management at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro. She can be reached at suz@uncg.edu or 336.334.5595.

one stop solution

Simplified

PARKING MANAGEMENT

High-Quality Parking Permit Printing

Parking permits are a vital aspect of increased parking lot security. Our wide-variety of Hang Tag & Decal designs, materials, & security features



ensures you have the flexibility to create a permit that's right for your needs.

Rydin Distribution: Your Permits. Delivered.

Say goodbye to licking envelopes. Our experts will prepare your parking permits, letters & any additional materials, and mail them directly to your parkers.



Start optimizing your staff's time and allow them to focus on more important tasks.

Parking Management Software: Rydin PermitExpress™

With Rydin PermitExpress™ Parking Management Software, you are in control of your parking program. With our hassle-free, user-friendly system, you can



now bring the following permit functions **online**: sales, distribution, citations, & data management.



Contact Us Today to Get Started!

e. sales@rydin.com | p. 800.448.1991 | www.rydin.com

permits. distribution. software